Vol. XVII. No. 2 SUMMER, 1950

SCRUTINY

A Quarterly Review

Edited by

L. C. KNIGHTS H. A. MASON

F. R. LEAVIS

CONTENTS

Page

APPEARANCE AND REALITY IN HENRY JAMES by *Marius Bewley* 90

JAMES'S 'WHAT MAISIE KNEW': A DISAGREEMENT, by *F. R. Leavis* 115

CORRESPONDENCE *re* 'SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT' 128

JOHN MARSTON'S PLAYS, by *John Peter* 132

THE 'DOCTOR FAUSTUS' OF THOMAS MANN, by *D. J. Enright* 154

REVIEWS 168

THEORY AND CRITICISM: *English Poetry: a Critical Introduction,* by F. W. Bateson, reviewed by R. G. Cox (p. 168). *Sire Gauvain et le Chevalier Vert,* reviewed by John Speirs (p. 172). ART BOOKS FOR ALL, reviews by Geoffrey Walton (p. 174). ACADEMIC CRITICISM TO-DAY, *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* and *English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans,* reviewed by Derek Traversi (p. 181).

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

APPEARANCE AND REALITY IN HENRY JAMES

I.

IN any tradition sustained as largely as the American one has been by a given set of ideals ('the American dream', as critics sometimes say), the collision between the practical and the visionary may cause a shock whose repercussions will become a characteristic in the art and literature that the tradition produces. Perhaps all art represents a conflict between appearance and reality, but American literature is inclined to register the shock with peculiar earnestness and simplicity. Sometimes the result of the struggle is that both the writer and the reader seem to emerge with a great uncertainty as to what is appearance and what is reality, or how to distinguish between truth and falsehood, or how to bring evil to a particular focus, or how to celebrate goodness. These problems took hold of Henry James, and they came at last to occupy a central position in his work. The reader is not always aware of their presence because it is probable that James himself did not really know how insidiously these considerations were in control. But it is impossible not to feel their effects operating throughout his work. These effects are frequently of great impressiveness, and in some of his greater stories and novels they betray his recurrent preoccupations: in some of his greater, but not his greatest, for the uncertainties seem to get the upper hand, and they are not uncertainties that enlarge, but rather they seem to diminish human nature. I believe it has sometimes been said by critics that James's long residence abroad relaxed his moral judgment so that he was incapable of distinguishing between a gentleman and a cad. If James sometimes appears inept in these matters, it is simply because the confusion is of a profounder sort than the critics imagine. Cads and gentlemen are made such by the social perspective in which they exist, and in viewing any given context of appearance and reality James developed an astigmatism that was essentially American. The fault that the critics deplore is not due to the fact that James stayed abroad too long, but that he didn't get out of America soon enough.

This concern with the relation between appearance and reality is at the basis of Hawthorne's art, but for Hawthorne the strain between the two terms is not as great as it was to become for James. Hawthorne spoke of 'a haunting perception of unreality', but he was still able to reconcile appearance and reality within the framework of a social and political orthodoxy, even if the cost of doing so was high. Hawthorne and James are seen to be involved with the same problem in a passage like the following from Hawthorne's *The New Adam and Eve*:

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'We who are born into the world's artificial system can never adequately know how little in our present state and circumstance is natural, and how much is merely the interpolation of the perverted heart and mind of man. Art has become a second and stronger nature; she is a stepmother, whose crafty tenderness has taught us to despise the bountiful and wholesome ministrations of our true parent. It is only through the medium of the imagination that we can lessen those iron fetters, which we call truth and reality, and make ourselves even partially sensible of what prisoners we are.'

From one point of view *The Scarlet Letter* is an exploration of the relation between appearance and reality. We have the visible embroidered letter that Hester Prynne wears on her breast, and the hidden letter, burned into the living flesh, that Arthur Dimmesdale wears beneath his tunic. And related to this problem we are faced, as later in James, with the difficulty of bringing evil to a particular focus. Is it centred in the adulterous couple, in the wronged husband, or in the horrors of puritan society? Hawthorne's achievement is that he is able to keep his terms so clear, the problem so precise, without at the same time sacrificing anything of its frightening complexity. This conflict between appearance and reality, and the consequent difficulty of knowing evil, is poetically explored in one of Hawthorne's greatest masterpieces, his short story, *Young Goodman Brown,* and in the even greater short story, *My Kinsman, Major Molineux.*[1] I haven't the space to examine these stories here as a preliminary step towards discussing the conflict in James, but the recurrence of this problem in American literature should be borne in mind, for it helps to define the quality of James's sensibility. But Hawthorne was able to make this conflict the subject of a great deal of his work without being victimized by it in the way James came to be. Perhaps I can make my point by referring to one of Hawthorne's most recurrent images—the looking glass. Several years ago Mr. Malcolm Cowley discussed this image at considerable length, and he noted that it expressed Hawthorne's concern with the distinction between appearance and reality. The image is important because it functions as a stabilizing metaphor which, if it demonstrates the distinction between the two terms, simultaneously demonstrates their intrinsic relation. In such a metaphor the two terms cannot be wrenched apart in any destructive way. In a story like *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment* the mirror image leads us back into a profounder sense of reality itself.

[1] *My Kinsman, Major Molineux* is especially interesting in any study of Hawthorne. The problems that were discussed in a preceding article as being typical of both Hawthorne and James, the conflict between America and Europe, and the conflict between the past and the present, as well as the appearance-reality conflict, are gathered into a single poetic treatment in this story, which is one of the greatest masterpieces in American literature, and which deals with the creation of 'the first American' in the person of its hero, Robin.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

II.

There is a typical motive in most of James's short stories which is reworked in a great variety of ways, and with great technical skill. Sometimes the technique is almost too skilful, too pat. What the technique amounts to is an exploitation of the ambiguities of experience for the purpose of revealing, of showing up, 'the world's artificial system'. In other words, the stories are designed to call into radical question the validity of the relation between appearances and the reality they profess to represent. I wish to consider two representative stories of this type here, and suggest how they illuminate certain puzzling questions that confront us in *The Golden Bowl.*

The first of these short stories, *The Path of Duty* (1885), is the less interesting. In it we see James treating the whole problem to a comparatively straightforward development. The plot deals with the love affair and engagement of Sir Ambrose Tester. Infatuated with a married woman, Lady Vandeleur, whose husband appears to be in the prime of health, Sir Ambrose allows himself to be badgered into marriage by his father, who wishes to see an heir to the title before he dies. Sir Ambrose becomes engaged to a charming English girl, Joscelind Bernardstone, who falls deeply in love with him, but for whom he only feigns, in the interests of decorum, a lover's affection. The engagement is confirmed in the interested eyes of London society by the couple appearing together frequently in public. Everything appears to be in order when, unseasonably, Lady Vandeleur's husband dies, leaving the beautiful widow free to marry Sir Ambrose, which she is clearly eager to do. But he in his turn is not now free, although the marital bars have not yet been decisively lowered. The question therefore arises whether or not he is justified in breaking his engagement with Joscelind, who is unaware of the relation existing between Lady Vandeleur and himself. The situation is complicated by the fact that the American woman who relates the story as a personal acquaintance of the characters involved is convinced that Joscelind would not survive the shock of a break, a conviction she communicates both to Sir Ambrose and Lady Vandeleur. In the end Sir Ambrose and Lady Vandeleur make an honourable sacrifice of each other's persons. In short, they take the path of duty, and Sir Ambrose marries Joscelind. The story ends on this note:

> 'Lady Vandeleur, as you know, has never married again; she is still the most beautiful widow in England. She enjoys the esteem of everyone, as well as the approbation of her conscience, for everyone knows the sacrifice she made, knows that she was even more in love with Sir Ambrose than he was with her. She goes out again, of course, as of old, and she constantly meets the baronet and his wife. She is supposed to be even "very nice" to Lady Tester, and she certainly treats her with exceeding civility. But you know (or perhaps you don't know) all the deadly things that, in London, may lie beneath that method. I don't in the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

least mean that Lady Vandeleur has any deadly intentions; she is a very good woman, and I am sure that in her heart she thinks she lets poor Joscelind off very easily. But the result of the whole situation is that Joscelind is in dreadful fear of her, for how can she help seeing that she has a very peculiar power over her husband? There couldn't have been a better occasion for observing the three together (if together it may be called, when Lady Tester is so completely outside) than those two days of ours at Doubleton. That's a house where they have met more than once before; I think she and Sir Ambrose like it. By "she" I mean, as he used to mean, Lady Vandeleur. You saw how Lady Tester was absolutely white with uneasiness. What can she do when she meets everywhere the implication that if two people in our time have distinguished themselves for their virtue, it is her husband and Lady Vandeleur? It is my impression that this pair are exceedingly happy. His marriage *has* made a difference, and I see him much less frequently and less intimately. But when I meet him I notice in him a kind of emanation of quiet bliss. Yes, they are certainly in felicity, they have trod the clouds together, they have soared into the blue, and they wear in their faces the glory of those altitudes. They encourage, they cheer, inspire, sustain each other; remind each other they have chosen the better part. Of course they have to meet for this purpose, and their interviews are filled, I am sure, with its sanctity. He holds up his head, as a man may who on a very critical occasion behaved like a perfect gentleman. It is only poor Joscelind that droops. Haven't I explained to you now why she doesn't understand?'

The Path of Duty is an undistinguished story, but it presents in its simplest guise that basic pattern to which so many of James's stories were to conform. Both the irony in the title and in the pun contained in the name of the country house where the infatuated pair meet, Doubleton, point to that conflict between appearance and reality we are discussing. The path of duty as it exists in 'the world's artificial system' is a matter of appearance only, although it is an appearance that claims spuriously to be related to reality. Yet the relation, if it exists at all, is so perverse that Sir Ambrose and Lady Vandeleur have sinned by being virtuous, and lied by adhering to their conception of the truth. This reversal of values for the purpose of revealing a deeper truth in a given situation can be effectively utilized in a given instance, but it tends to detach the writer at last from those values that normally constitute human life, and we shall be able to trace one unfortunate effect of the habit when we consider *The Golden Bowl*.

James published the second story which I wish to consider here, *The Liar*, in 1889. In this plot the interaction of truth and falsehood, of appearance and reality, is far more complicated. It is easy to ask after reading the first story: Where or what is the path of duty? But it is equally easy to read the second story without its

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

occurring to anyone that the essential question is: Who is the liar? Because this ambiguity is so intricately embedded in the narrative it will be necessary to deal with the plot here in somewhat greater detail than the other story called for. *The Liar* opens when Oliver Lyon, a successful young portrait painter, arrives as a house guest at Staves, Arthur Ashmore's house in Hertfordshire, commissioned to do a portrait of old Sir David Ashmore. A house party is in progress, and as Lyon settles down to work on the picture during the ensuing days, he renews, among the guests, an early friendship with a young woman he had known years before when he was an art student at Munich, and whom he had asked, in those days, to marry him. He has since lost sight of her until this occasion, when to his great pleasure he observes her sitting near him at dinner on the first evening. She in her turn is delighted to meet again her admirer of some years before, and she introduces him to her husband, Colonel Clement Capadose, who is also a guest in the house. Before having actually spoken to her, Lyon has obliquely observed at dinner that her eyes frequently direct themselves to a handsome man across the dinner table with looks that Lyon accepts as proof of her love for the gentleman so singled out. He later proves to be her husband, and Lyon, who still greatly admires his former friend, begins to feel the stings of envy. Nevertheless, Colonel Capadose, who is not only a handsome but an amiable man, greatly interests him, and Lyon begins to draw him out, a procedure that is easy because Colonel Capadose obviously enjoys talking. As the friendship warms it becomes obvious that the Colonel is a good deal given to exaggeration, or even to deliberate romancing. This weakness is easily accepted by Colonel Capadose's friends, who understand how harmless it is, and are content to overlook it. At first even Lyon sees the truth in this attitude:

> 'The observation of these three days showed him [Lyon] that if Capadose was an abundant he was not a malignant liar and that his fine faculty exercised itself mainly on subjects of small direct importance. "He is the liar platonic," he said to himself; "He is disinterested, he doesn't operate with a hope of gain or with a desire to injure. It is art for art's sake and he is prompted by the love of beauty. He has an inner vision of what might have been, of what ought to be, and he helps on the good cause by the simple substitution of a *nuance*." '

It soon becomes Lyon's chief interest to observe Mrs. Capadose, to study her face in the hope of seeing some spasm of revulsion at her husband's vulgarity pass across it. 'Lyon had no nefarious plan, no conscious wish to practise upon her shame or loyalty; but he did say to himself that he should like to bring her round to feel that there would have been more dignity in a union with a certain other person. He even dreamed of the hour when, with a burning face, she would ask *him* not to take it up. Then he should be almost consoled—he would be magnanimous'.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After the dispersal of the house party, Lyon does not lose sight of the Capadoses in London. He assiduously cultivates their acquaintance. He paints, as a gift for them, their little daughter, and allows this to form the prelude towards his asking, as a special favour, that Colonel Capadose should also sit for his portrait—the object merely being that Lyon, as he tells them, wishes to render the Colonel's interesting face as a subject pre-eminently suitable to his art. James puts it in these terms:

> 'The desire grew in him to paint the Colonel also—an operation from which he promised himself a rich private satisfaction. He would draw him out, he would set him up in that totality about which he had talked with Sir David, and none but the initiated would know. They, however, would rank the picture high, and it would be indeed six rows deep—a masterpiece of subtle characterization, of legitimate treachery'.

The Colonel, out of amiability, consents to sit, and as the portrait grows under Lyon's hand, the 'legitimate treachery' of Lyon's original intention also grows:

> 'The only point that troubled him was the idea that when he should send his picture to the Academy he should not be able to give the title, for the catalogue, simply as "The Liar". However, it little mattered, for he had now determined that his character should be perceptible even to the meanest intelligence—as overtopping as it had become to his own sense of the living man'.

Two things are worth noting here. First: that reference to the quality of the future audience is significant. It supplies a clue to what is happening in Lyon's consciousness. He no longer looks for fineness of appreciation, but has grown eager for the most vulgar public applause, whereas a few pages earlier he had wished to appeal only to the initiated few. Now, to secure this applause, he is willing to betray his friendship with Mrs. Capadose, and simulate a friendship with the husband that is entirely a lie. Second: his static conception of Colonel Capadose as a liar has blotted out any finer sense of the Colonel as a human being. It has become completely 'overtopping . . . to his own sense of the living man'. Oliver Lyon is on the point of committing that crime which for both Hawthorne and James was the worst possible: of violating the integrity of another man's personality, of seeking to take possession of it through false images and conventional laws.

But Lyon's treachery is deeper yet. He hopes, by exposing the husband to public scorn, to enter into an emotional union with the wife—a kind of adulterous liaison of the spirit in which the two lovers of earlier years will find a deeper communion than ever yet in the sense of the wife's revulsion from the vulgarity of her lying husband. Having earlier failed to marry her, Lyon's triumph will be the final one. They will be happy together in knowing how much better a husband the portrait painter would have made. The situation that will have been arrived at then will be very much the same

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

situation that James presented in the closing paragraph of *The Path of Duty*, which was quoted above. But in actual fact things do not work out as Lyon wishes. The Colonel and his wife secretly destroy the calumniating portrait, and when Colonel Capadose denies the act of vandalism his wife supports her husband in the lie—supports him whole-heartedly, beautifully, competently.[2] She is thus presented to the reader through Lyon's eyes as a contaminated nature, and a shudder is invited. But in actual fact it is only Mrs. Capadose who has known how to discriminate between appearance and reality in this story, who knows that it is not her husband but Lyon who is the liar.

So far from being a contaminated character in James's eyes, as critics have consistently maintained, Mrs. Capadose is an early forerunner of Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl*. *The Golden Bowl* is a gigantic parable in which we see how truth is fabricated out of lies. The theme is so subtly developed that one is hardly aware of what is actually taking place, but once the process is isolated it is hard and glittering enough to convince anybody. The theme itself as it appears in *The Golden Bowl* does magnificent credit to James's technical skill, but it also points to a deep, a downright fantastic perversity of temperament that is positively American. Like Hawthorne, James wanted to escape from 'the world's artificial system', but it is doubtful if 'those iron fetters, which we call truth and reality' can really be lessened in the way James thought.

The plot of *The Golden Bowl* is well known. Maggie Verver, the charming and devoted daughter of the fabulously wealthy, art-collecting American, Adam Verver, marries an impressively descended but impoverished young Italian nobleman, Prince Amerigo. Maggie's conscience bothers her because she feels she has disrupted the happy relationship with her father, and she thinks that if he were to marry again—someone very suitable, of course—the old delightful intimacy might be re-established. An old acquaintance of the Ververs', Fanny Assingham, at this point invites a girlhood friend of Maggie's to stay with her. It occurs to Maggie, as a result of this renewed proximity, that Charlotte Stant might make an excellent wife for her father. The marriage occurs in due course, and for a time things seem to be happening almost as Maggie had wished. But at last Maggie discovers that Fanny Assingham had neglected to tell her that the Prince and Charlotte had been in love long before their present marriages, but that their common poverty had compelled them to relinquish each other. It has become

[2]Something might be made of the fact that Colonel Capadose places the blame for the vandalism on a nameless, drunken artist's model who has earlier wandered into Lyon's studio while the Colonel was sitting. But the model has nothing whatever to lose from Capadose's allegation, and everyone, including Colonel Capadose, knows that she will never be seen or heard of again, whereas it was no anonymous figure, but Colonel Capadose, his wife and child, that Lyon was eager to pillory in the eyes of all London society.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

evident to Maggie at the same time that their recent marriages—the Prince's to Maggie and Charlotte's to Mr. Verver—stand good to take the tooth out of their earlier sacrifice. The danger that now confronts Maggie seems to have more positively physical aspects than that which confronted poor Joscelind Bernardstone in *The Path of Duty*, but in other respects the situations are very similar. Maggie is simply threatened with exclusion.. But unlike Joscelind, Maggie *does* understand. She has the fineness of intuition to know that if she makes a scene (apart from the effects of this on her carefully guarded relation with her father) the intimacy of the guilty couple will be confirmed. They will take open arms against Maggie, or worse, draw spiritually closer in the sense of their shared guilt. Therefore, Maggie must prove herself a very Iago for the sake of preserving her marriage—for the sake of making something valid out of it; and she ends up by lying as valiantly as Mrs. Capadose. She lies to keep both the Prince and Charlotte at first, and then only Charlotte, whom she sees as the real danger, in ignorance of her own knowledge of their misconduct—her theory being that this will give her time to get the two separated, or somehow reclaimed, without that crisis which she knows would defeat her.

> 'She was learning almost from minute to minute to be a mistress of shades—since always when there were possibilities of intimacy there were also, by that fact, in intercourse, possibilities of irridescence; but she was working against an adversary who was a master of shades too and on whom if she didn't look out she would presently have imposed a consciousness of the nature of their struggle. To feel him in fact, to think of his feeling himself, her adversary in things of this fineness—to see him at all in short brave a name that would represent him as in opposition—was already to be nearly reduced to a visible smothering of her cry of alarm. Should he guess they were having in their so occult manner a *high* fight, and that it was she, all the while, in her supposed stupidity, who had made it high and was keeping it high—in the event of his doing this before they could leave town she should verily be lost'.

This course that Maggie embarks on clearly involves all the deception that a 'mistress of shades' can draw on, and it is James's task to justify it. He attempts this on a grand scale in the scene in which, in the darkness of a summer night, the two young women confront each other on the terrace at Fawns, Adam Verver's magnificent great house, for the purpose of mutual betrayal. This is the scene, I think, rather than the one that gives us Mrs. Assingham breaking the chalice, in which all the power of James's gift for symbolism is concentrated. On this occasion Maggie lies—not casually or spontaneously, but with the deepest thought and purpose—lies, indeed, as for something dear and sacred, and she continues to act on her lie, building it into the structure of her final happiness. The thing to insist on here is that the lie is not merely a lie of convenience: James deliberately invests it with a certain sanctity. It

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seems to be offered, not only as the expression of a beautiful consciousness, but as a kind of philosophic comment on the nature of reality. This scene occurs in Chapter II of the Fifth Book, and this chapter, excerpted from the novel itself, may be taken as one of the most astonishing things James ever wrote. The very words on the page seem paralyzed in an apprehension of disaster, and an atmosphere of dread is evoked from circumstances which, innocent in themselves, loom through the summer darkness in sinister outline. The action, the movements of Charlotte and Maggie, occur with ritualistic slowness and economy, and the confrontation scene has a density of symbolism that presents the conflict between Maggie and Charlotte as a showing forth of those deeper conflicts between appearance and reality, truth and falsehood, that always lie at the heart of James's deepest meaning.

The chapter opens while Adam Verver, Charlotte, Amerigo, and Fanny Assingham are playing cards in the smoking room at Fawns. Maggie has withdrawn to a sofa in a far part of the great luxurious room, and pretending to read a French Review, she stealthily watches, over its top, the four people intent at their game, yet all the while, as Maggie knows, playing on each other more than they play at bridge. James uses the card game to draw out incisively the lines of relationship between the characters of his drama, and by it he evokes the idea of 'play', of trained skill and canny prevision, that becomes an implicit theme in all that follows. This, together with images of the theatre (particularly when Maggie leaves the house and sees the same scene framed through the lighted window, as on a stage) has the effect of dehumanizing—of puppetizing, as it were—the persons so revealed. What this opening has really done has been to establish symbolically the possibility of Maggie's control over events and persons—to show her suggestively as a kind of puppeteer. But Charlotte is a threat to this control, and later in the chapter when Charlotte, taking Maggie by the arm, shows her the same scene through the same window, she is presenting herself as a rival puppeteer intent on manipulating appearances in a different way. This theme of the *doubleness* of control over appearances that is possible in the situation is developed to an unrivalled pitch of subtlety in the chapter as a whole, but to follow that particular thread of analysis through to the end would unduly prolong the present paper. But we are made to understand that the relation between appearance and reality is instable and uncertain, and that 'the world's artificial system' can be tampered with, or reduced to obedience—reduced, that is to say, to a game of cards or a staged effect, where there is always the possibility of an alternative play or a new illusion. This is a highly tractable version of reality, subject to alteration, and therefore amenable to the lie that Maggie presently throws into the middle of it. It ultimately degrades the dignity of the people acted on, but it invests the ones who act with a sinister interest and power.

But to return to our account of the action in this chapter: missing Maggie from her post on the sofa where she has been reading

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the French Review, Charlotte relinquishes her seat at the card table to Colonel Assingham who has been, for this purpose, kept in the background, and seeks out Maggie on the terrace. Charlotte is not aware how much Maggie knows about her illicit relation with Amerigo, or how much she doesn't. But it is characteristic of Charlotte that she is not, to Maggie's degree, a player on appearances. She is capable of a clandestine love affair—of keeping up a comparatively vulgar and straightforward sham—but she is not a virtuoso on the finer hypocrisies. She has not, therefore, been able to bear the uncertainty of her position, and she plans, for once in the novel, to put a straight question to Maggie and wait for an answer which, whether true or false, she will insist on being straight also. 'Have you any ground of complaint against me?' Charlotte asks. 'Is there any wrong you consider I've done you?' In asking the question Charlotte foresees only two possible answers. If Maggie accuses her of misconduct with Amerigo, Charlotte, although not desiring this answer, counts on her own ability to bring the contest off successfully when it is moved to this level of open defiance. A 'scene' is something her comparatively unattenuated femininity can cope with. On the other hand, if Maggie lies, Charlotte counts (mistakenly, as it proves) on Maggie's being helplessly confined in a false position, leaving Charlotte a freer hand than ever with Amerigo. But Charlotte has only the moderately rich and rather complacent deceitfulness of a woman infatuated with one man while comfortably married to another. In contrast to her, Maggie's ability to lie has all the grandeur of scope, all the philosophic internal consistency, that belongs to the masculine nature. Despite the appearances of things, Charlotte has no more of a chance against Maggie than Charles the Bold had against Louis XI. And it is as a kind of female Charles the Bold that Charlotte, with her overwhelming question, seeks out the seemingly abject Maggie, who is hiding on a far corner of the terrace. Maggie sees her coming through the shafts of light that cut out patches of visibility from the encircling darkness, and this patterning of light and darkness in which their game is played is itself a symbol of the mottled surface of truth and falsehood that the two are plotting out between them, just as, similarly, the wonderfully realized sense of distance down which Maggie sees Charlotte approaching becomes a symbol of the reach of Maggie's penetration. She aims her lie for the future with unerring vision, and by pretending to be the hunted she brings down her quarry at last. At this point James resorts to the imagery he had recently used in *The Beast in the Jungle*. Charlotte is a 'creature who had escaped by force from her cage'. The quality of a beast of prey is insisted on: '. . . there was in her whole motion assuredly, even as so dimly discerned, a kind of portentous intelligent stillness'. The terrace scene is charged with the greatest impressiveness—a kind of unforgettable theatricality—and as Maggie looks down from her station, no less than John Marcher in the earlier story, she seems to see the Jungle of her life, and the lurking beast, ready to spring. The radical flaw, on any deeper scrutiny, is simply that Charlotte

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

isn't, after all, an abstract Beast in the Jungle, and James pays a high price for that reference to her having broken out of her cage. This reference to Charlotte's cage (but this is by the way) relates very significantly to Maggie's later impression of her husband, after she has won him back, as 'caged' : 'a man who couldn't now without an instant effect on her sensibility give an instinctive push to the door she hadn't completely closed behind her'. James is aware of the implications (as the quotation pursued to the end would show), but his attempt to explain them away is unsatisfactory enough to leave Maggie a pretty poor version of a charming, harmless heroine.

Confronted, finally, with Charlotte's question—the question that has already been quoted—Maggie chooses to put herself in a false position. It would be tedious to analyse here the whole of her reasoning, but the sum of it seems to be that she sees how, by debasing herself in front of Charlotte, by literally wallowing in her abjectness, she will have the effect of caricaturing, as it were, Charlotte's sense of her own security that may arise from her (Maggie's) lie. She will, in short, persecute Charlotte by the extreme stylization of the way a wronged wife can submit to injury. It will then be Charlotte herself whom Maggie's lie will have the effect of placing in a false position, even to the extent of making her position so untenable that she will take to flight. In James's fantastic description of Maggie's central treachery that comes at the close of this chapter, we can trace the devoutly interlocked fingers of falsehood and truth :

> '. . . Charlotte, though rising there radiantly before her, was really off in some darkness of space that would keep her in solitude and harass her with care. The heart of the Princess swelled accordingly even in her abasement; she had kept in tune with the right, and something certainly, something that might resemble a rare flower snatched from an impossible ledge, would, and possibly soon, come of it for her. The right, the right—yes, it took this extraordinary form of humbugging, as she had called it, to the end. It was only a question of not, by a hair's breadth, deflecting into the truth. So supremely was she braced. "You must take it from me that your anxiety rests on a misconception. You must take it from me that I've never at any moment fancied I could suffer by you. You must take it from me that I've never thought of you but as beautiful, wonderful and good. Which is all, I think, that you can possibly ask".'

It is impossible to quote with much effectiveness from a scene so tightly and poetically organized, but if one re-reads the chapter with these remarks in mind, it may be granted that a large part of the sinister quality, that air of pervasive unlocalized evil that is so characteristic of James, is due to an inversion of ordinary human values, and even of appearance and reality itself. It is as if the old traditional moral vessels that had long held our sense of evil had been cracked, and evil itself seeped through on to the whole fabric. One is almost shocked by James's unrivalled ability to elevate this

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inversion to a level of sublimity. At the close of this chapter, just after Maggie has pronounced the tremendous lie quoted above, Charlotte embraces and kisses her. The act is unmistakably meant to suggest the betrayal in the garden, but although we can follow James's intention, the betrayal itself remains a little ambiguous.

This scene in which Charlotte confronts Maggie is balanced by a second scene later on in which Maggie confronts Charlotte, and this scene has to be studied with the one just examined in order to see Maggie's plan working out to the full. The conflicting characters that James wishes to establish for the two girls are no doubt suggested by the fact that Charlotte confronts Maggie in darkness, and Maggie confronts Charlotte in sunlight, but after the first scene, the second, good as it is, comes off rather weakly. Maggie comes to Charlotte, as the latter immediately recognizes, 'to grovel'. Maggie here plays out to the hilt her chosen plan of being 'abject', and it drives Charlotte in desperation, in this scene, to commit herself to the decision of returning to America with her husband.

When Maggie at the close of the book gathers her reward, the pot of gold at the foot of her arch of lies, it appears that in his own profound and Jamesian way Amerigo has also been lying to Charlotte, and he has proved his fidelity to Maggie by virtue of that lying. This is established very clearly:

> 'But Maggie at last broke it. "If Charlotte doesn't understand me it's because I've prevented her. I've chosen to deceive her and lie to her".
>
> The Prince kept his eyes on her. "I know what you've chosen to do. But I've chosen to do the same".'

There is no need to elaborate here on the Prince's lie. Its nature has, of course, been rarefied. But it provides a promising basis for communion between the spiritually reunited husband and wife, and they draw near to each other in their sense of it, just as, in *The Path of Duty*, we have watched Sir Ambrose and Lady Vandeleur achieving a highly *questionable* union on the basis, not of their lie, but of their 'duty'. The reversal of values could hardly be more complete.

Up to a point this reversal has the effect of social criticism. But the world of a novelist depends also on the permanence and validity of certain social surfaces and appearances, and on the assumption that they somehow represent reality. It is doubtless a good thing for an artist to call into question 'the world's artificial system', but there would seem to be limits beyond which he could not, for the sake of his art, profitably pursue his questioning. In some of his late work I think James was on the point of crossing this boundary, and of writing novels which, in spite of their realistic pretensions, give us a world of instable and displaced values: for in the world as we live in it, values are known through appearances, and it is impossible to question the one without casting suspicion on the other. I am not concerned here with why James seemed to insist on this reversal of values beyond the point of safety. Mr.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Quentin Anderson in his distinguished essay, *Henry James and the New Jerusalem*,[3] has given us a sketch of the late novels in relation to the philosophy of Henry James's father which might prove enlightening in this respect. All I am interested in here is the evidence of James's distrust of appearance as that evidence exists in his art, and the unfortunate effect it had on his art. For I think it can be shown without resorting to evidence *outside* the novels themselves that James wrenched appearance and reality apart, at least in some of his work, far beyond any requirement of social criticism. The novels in which this discerption is accomplished, or at least threatened, are not, I think, his very best work, although, a little paradoxically, *The Golden Bowl* comes near to being included in that category. On the other hand, those novels in which appearance is successfully and intelligibly correlated with reality are, as a group, more distinguished than those in which the correlation is notably imperfect; and two of these novels, *The Portrait of a Lady* and *What Maisie Knew* are, I think, James's two great masterpieces. I would insist on the latter novel especially at this point, for occurring as it does in the late period, or just on the eve of it, it has been overshadowed by the three long novels of the so-called 'Major Phase', and it has been disgracefully neglected.

I wish to discuss *What Maisie Knew*, a novel in which appearance and reality co-exist without violence to each other, and *The Turn of the Screw*, its companion piece in many ways, but also its exact contrary in others; for *The Turn of the Screw* is little more than a hide-and-seek game between the two terms. If any of James's fictions could be called a metaphysic demonstrating the enmity of appearance and reality, it is this one. The comparison I hope will clarify certain issues that are important in evaluating James as a novelist.

III.

In the career of a poet or novelist, particularly in the case of a writer as fertile as James, it should be expected that a given impetus or arc of interest, would not be exhausted in a single work, and that corners of the given problem that remain obscure in the one work might be illuminated from the point of view adopted in another if that second work seems to be significantly related. There seems to be such a relation between *What Maisie Knew* and *The Turn of the Screw*. I haven't the space here to make a complete comparison between the two novels, and in any event I am not sure that would be profitable. The similarity between them is highly suggestive, but it cannot in the nature of the case be conclusive. What, finally, is of the greatest interest is the light the comparison throws on the contrasting relations between appearance and reality in the two books. For the success of *Maisie* arises partly from the stability of that relation as it exists there, whereas the instability of the relation in *The Turn of the Screw*, if it generates an

[3] *Kenyon Review*, Autumn, 1946.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

effective atmosphere in the novel, nevertheless limits the possibilities of achievement. For the sake of conciseness it will be necessary here to assume a familiarity with the novels on the part of the reader, and press on immediately to the important concluding chapter of *What Maisie Knew*. We find the little girl here the centre of a struggle among parties who wish to claim her for themselves. And these parties arrange themselves in the same identical relationships with each other that exist in *The Turn of the Screw* between the governess on the one hand, and Peter Quint and Miss Jessel on the other, for the possession of Miles and Flora,—the chief difference being that in *Maisie*, Mrs. Beale (Maisie's former governess, but now her stepmother) and Sir Claude (her stepfather) are not ghosts. But the step-parents in *Maisie* and the servants in *The Turn of the Screw* correspond in deeper ways than any suggested by superficial arrangements with the other characters. Maisie, in her innocence, has been used as a convenience for keeping assignations in the illicit liaison that has grown up between her stepmother and stepfather, and to a disturbing degree she has been taken into the confidence of her elders. It is her proud pitiful little boast that she brought them together, and her reward is in the happiness which she imagines they have in being together. But Maisie's innocence remains uncontaminated throughout. She speaks as if with precocious knowledge, but what the reader knows is that her precocity exists in a sensitive response to human feelings and relationships around her, but as yet a response unsupported by adult knowledge. Now if one examines the passages in which Miles's and Flora's former relation with Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are expatiated on in Chapter VIII of *The Turn of the Screw*—those passages which particularly seem to suggest that the children have been morally corrupted—we find that the essence of Miles's offence consists in his having lied to Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper at Bly, concerning his familiarity with Peter Quint. And it is obvious that his reason for doing so is to shield Quint's and Miss Jessel's assignations from the prying curiosity of the other servants. This fact, when the governess learns of it from Mrs. Grose, is interpreted by her in the blackest possible colours for little Miles. But we must remember that this 'sin' is precisely the one of which Maisie has been guilty. Surrounded by adulterous lovers, Maisie has never failed to lie for them when necessary—to lie valiantly, scrupulously, innocently. Her lies do not disturb us on these occasions as Maggie Verver's do just because we understand how innocent and good Maisie really is. Her innocence is not contaminated by the lies; it purifies them. The difference between Miles and Maisie is simply that in the latter case we know at last what Maisie knew, and in Miles's case we only know what his governess imagines he knew. And about the governess there will be more to say.

The equation between the step-parents and the servants cannot be a perfect one of course, for we do not know enough about the servants. Despite his crippling weaknesses of character, Sir Claude is an attractive person, and his regard for Maisie has been genuine.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On the other hand, Peter Quint is a somewhat mysterious figure (in the flesh, I mean) to whom, with sinister implications, 'vices more than suspected' are attributed. But Maisie's nefarious mother, Ida, speaking to Maisie of Sir Claude, can say:

> 'You're old enough at any rate to know there are a lot of things I don't say that I easily might; though it would do me good, I assure you, to have spoken my mind for once in my life. I don't speak of your father's infamous wife [Mrs. Beale]: that may give you a notion of the way I'm letting you off. When I say 'you' I mean your precious friends and backers. If you don't do justice to my forbearing, out of delicacy, to mention, just as a last word, about your stepfather, a little fact or two of a kind that really I should only *have* to mention to shine myself in comparison, and after every calumny, like pure gold: if you don't do me *that* justice you'll never do me justice at all'.

The atmosphere of *Maisie* doesn't make the most of these hints and charges against Sir Claude, but they add up to as much of the same thing in terms of tangible evidence as Mrs. Grose's charges against Quint. We haven't, actually, any more reason for supposing Peter Quint to have been a monster of iniquity than we have for believing Sir Claude to be. I am speaking of course of Peter Quint as a man, and not as a ghost. There is a great difference between the two, and it isn't absurd to insist on the point, for all the critics who have accepted the validity of the apparitions have also postulated the identity between Peter Quint the man and Peter Quint the ghost. But we have James's word for it that 'Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are not "ghosts" at all, as we know the ghost, but goblins, elves, imps, demons as loosely constructed as those of the old trials for witchcraft'. It is perhaps of the essence of the confusion imposed by *The Turn of the Screw* that the question of the true nature of the ghosts (once conceding their supernatural character) should remain obscure; but in view of James's words it is surprising that the critics who have commented on this novel have never for a moment entertained any of those salutary doubts that occurred to Hamlet on the platform before Elsinore. My point is that it is unjustifiable to carry our moral judgment on Peter Quint the ghost back to Peter Quint the man, for we do not know the way in which the ghost represents the man in this particular instance. Mrs. Grose's remark about Quint, so blackening in all they *could* mean, are insufficient to warrant the establishment of an identity between them. In making our final judgment on the nature of the relation between the children and the servants it will be necessary, then, to make it in terms of the living servants, and not of the apparitions. Of these latter, one of the few definite things we know of them (from the *Preface*) is that they are 'evoked', a term used of evil spirits, but not usually, I think, of human spirits. At any rate, the word posits a real relation between the demons and someone living at Bly; and it will be seen, I think, that the person is the governess and not the children.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Struggling with Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale for possession of Maisie in the last chapter of the earlier novel we have Maisie's governess, Mrs. Wix. Mrs. Wix represents, clearly, a norm of respectability in the book, and her desire to rescue Maisie from the irregular influences to which she is exposed with her step-parents *seems* to be both passionate and disinterested. However there are some very enigmatic aspects about Mrs. Wix that ought to be noted. There is some danger of disproportionately magnifying these aspects but previous critics seem to have ignored them entirely. The atmosphere of 'horror' in *Maisie* is one of its solid achievements, more substantial and enduring than the 'horror' of *The Turn of the Screw*, and these touches in Mrs. Wix, however they are to be interpreted in other respects, add their own contribution to that atmosphere. Elderly, ugly, fantastic as she is, Mrs. Wix falls in love with Sir Claude. The fact isn't insisted on, and it might even be possible to interpret in non-erotic terms her passionate avowal to Maisie that she 'adores' Sir Claude, although I doubt it. The revealing glimpse we are given into the real situation—so shocking to our nerves just because it is so sudden and only a glimpse—occurs in Chapter XXIV. Although the allusions are veiled, Mrs. Wix's behaviour and speeches are such as to be understandable only in terms of an utter infatuation for the young man, and there are moments when our belief in her disinterestedness wears thin. Her desire to keep Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale separated, if it arises primarily from her concern for Maisie, seems at some points not to be untouched by sexual jealousy. And the ugly possibility arises in the reader's mind that Mrs. Wix's attachment to Maisie may match Mrs. Beale's in this: that for them both, and however much they may like Maisie for herself, the little girl provides a means of closing in on Sir Claude. In what seems to me a misreading of the text, Mr. Joseph Warren Beach has said in *The Method of Henry James*: '. . . Mrs. Wix and Sir Claude are actually "taken in" by what seems to be her eventual development of a "moral sense" like their own'. The more one re-reads the passages in which Mrs. Wix endeavours to inculcate a 'moral sense' in Maisie, the more uneasy one becomes. Mrs. Wix's assumptions about Maisie's knowledge in these passages, and her tone of offensive reproach, constitute as much of a violation of Maisie's innocence as anything in the course of Maisie's short career. And one cannot rid oneself of the feeling that it is precisely that 'moral sense' which Mrs. Wix seeks to give Maisie that will deliver the child into the governess's hands, and as a consequence of that, will ultimately draw Sir Claude into her orbit as well. Mrs. Wix's 'moral sense' at these points is nothing more than allegiance to 'the world's artificial system', and it is not to be identified with anything in Sir Claude. In the last chapter, accusing Maisie of having lost her newly developed 'moral sense', Mrs. Wix accuses Sir Claude of culpability:

> ' "You've nipped it in the bud. You've killed it when it had begun to live'.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'She was a newer Mrs. Wix than ever, a Mrs. Wix high and great; but Sir Claude was not after all to be treated as a little boy with a missed lesson. "I've not killed anything," he said; "on the contrary I think I've produced life. I don't know what to call it—I haven't even known how decently to deal with it, to approach it; but, whatever it is, it's the most beautiful thing I've ever met—it's exquisite, it's sacred." '

The differentiation between Mrs. Wix's 'moral sense' and Sir Claude's moral sensibility could not be more complete. But there is a good deal more to Mrs. Wix than these unpleasant distortions. Her 'moral sense' is capable of being educated into fineness, and it is this potentiality that both Sir Claude and Maisie recognize in their different ways. It is in the light of this recognition that Maisie goes off with Mrs. Wix at last. It is Maisie's mission in life (James is very clear about it) to educate her elders, but of the three people struggling for possession of Maisie in the concluding chapter, only poor old Mrs. Wix remains amenable to education. Sir Claude already knows as much as Maisie, but he is hopelessly trapped by circumstances which his weakness is unwilling to surmount; and for Mrs. Beale there has never been a question of education at all. If Maisie's wonderful little character is to continue to have a field for operation, if it is to grow into a maturity as fine as its childhood has been, Mrs. Wix is the only possible choice for Maisie in the end.

In these remarks I have presented most of the evidence for drawing the comparison between *What Maisie Knew* and the ghost story of the following year. It will be seen that the earlier novel throws a great deal of illumination on facts that are imperfectly presented in *The Turn of the Screw*. Beyond the emotional distortions provided by the governess's presentation of the facts about Peter Quint and Miles, we have no more factual evidence for supposing Miles to have been morally corrupted than we have for supposing Maisie to be vicious. Yet on the same evidence we convict the children at Bly, but we let Maisie off because we have to. The governess at Bly, we say, is so persuasive. A detailed examination of the governess's technique of persuasion will provide an insight into a full-scale operation by James of that habit, the ravaging symptoms of which we have looked at in *The Golden Bowl*, of tearing appearance and reality apart.

Miles and Flora are presented to us entirely through the governess's words, and she is 'a mistress of shades'. The reader and the housekeeper at Bly are equally helpless in her hands. The dialogue in *The Turn of the Screw* is written with an economy remarkable for James at any period, for in building up her case against the children the governess must make every word count. One can study her method at its absolutely representative level in Chapter II, in which she receives the letter from Miles's headmaster saying the boy is dismissed from his school. Neither the governess nor ourselves ever know the facts of the case, and there is no reason for magnifying the incident into an incriminating episode. Mr.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Edmund Wilson has rightly remarked in his essay, *The Ambiguity of Henry James,* that the governess 'colours' the dismissal 'on no evidence at all, with a significance somehow sinister'. But it is this process of 'colouring' that calls for attention here. The governess, with the opened letter from the headmaster in her hand (a letter which, as we know, merely announces the fact of the dismissal), is talking to Mrs. Grose, the estimable but illiterate housekeeper. At this time the governess has never seen Miles, and knows nothing about him; but she feels free to ask:

> ' " . . . Is he really *bad*?"
>
> 'The tears were still in her eyes. "Do the gentlemen say so?"
>
> ' "They go into no particulars. They simply express their regret that it should be impossible to keep him. That can have but one meaning." Mrs. Grose listened with dumb emotion; she forebore to ask me what this meaning might be; so that, presently, to put the thing with some coherence and with the mere aid of her presence to my own mind, I went on: "That he's an injury to the others."
>
> 'At this, with one of the quick turns of simple folk, she suddenly flamed up. "Master Miles!—*him* an injury?"
>
> 'There was such a flood of good faith in it that, though I had not yet seen the child, my very fears made me jump to the absurdity of the idea. I found myself, to meet my friend the better, offering it, on the spot, sarcastically. "To his poor little innocent mates." '

Towards the evening of the same day the governess renews her questioning of poor Mrs. Grose:

> ' "I take what you said to me at noon as a declaration that *you've* never known him to be bad."
>
> 'She threw back her head; she had clearly by this time, and very honestly, adopted an attitude. "Oh never known him—I don't pretend *that*.' "
>
> 'I was upset again. "Then you *have* known him——?"
>
> ' "Yes, indeed, Miss, thank God." '
>
> ' "You mean that a boy who never is——?"
>
> ' "Is no boy for *me*." '
>
> ' I held her tighter. 'You like them with the spirit to be naughty?" Then, keeping pace with her answer, "So do I." I eagerly brought out. "But not to the degree to contaminate——"
>
> ' "To contaminate?"—my big word left her at a loss.
>
> 'I explained it. "To corrupt." '

This is the first time we see the governess's system in operation. With no evidence to go on except an extremely ambiguous letter, and with a great deal to contradict her, the governess is yet able in an incredibly short space to present Miles as, in all probability, vicious; herself as virtuous in supposing that he is so; and to bully

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the poor housekeeper into a state of partial assent. Her technique is nearly perfect. She begins by asking if Miles is really *'bad'*, and the printed italics hide an undefined wealth of meaning in the term. She then says what is certainly *not* true, but what would certainly be believed by Mrs. Grose on the governess's word—that Miles's dismissal 'can have but one meaning', and 'that he's an injury to others'. These are gratuitous contributions of her own that have an insidious look of plausibility about them. When the housekeeper protests, the governess ascribes it to her simplicity. However, in order not to proceed too quickly for persuasion she seems to meet Mrs. Grose half way, and turns the last statement into an ironic comment; but it is clear that the irony exists at the expense of Miles's 'poor little innocent mates'. The governess, if ever so softly at this point, is implying that the friends Miles might have made at school would not have been the 'innocent' ones who could have been easily injured. It should be noticed that the vague suggestiveness in the italicized *'bad'* begins to be narrowed at this point by opposing 'innocent' to it as its contrary. The quality of the viciousness that is to be attributed to Miles and Flora is already progressing towards definition. In the second part of the quotation above, the italicized *'you've'* is significant. It will suggest to Mrs. Grose and to the reader easily enough that although Mrs. Grose has never known Miles to be bad, there are those who have. Mrs. Grose, however, being a good woman with sane ideas about how boys should behave, in spite of the earlier drilling she has suffered from the governess, still interprets 'bad' quite innocently. But this very sanity or normality on the housekeeper's part is attributed by the governess to an 'attitude'. Mrs. Grose, the governess would say, has fallen into a protective stance in regard to Miles. It is obviously Mrs. Grose who maintains an impartial and judicial attitude towards the evidence (or rather, the lack of it), but these very virtues are turned against her by the governess. Mrs. Grose says that she *has* known Miles to be bad (using the word in its innocent sense), and she thinks this is only proper for a boy. But the governess, with a tingle of nerves, interprets Mrs. Grose's 'bad' in the sinister sense, and she proceeds to persuade Mrs. Grose that it was in this sense that she has used the word. The two following questions that the governess asks Mrs. Grose end with significant dashes, allowing Mrs. Grose and the reader to fill in the blanks with any of the unspeakable words that the governess's concluding remarks will shortly suggest. The reader should also notice that obscene tightening of the governess's grip on Mrs. Grose's arm as the governess closes in on that *usually* innocent word, 'naughty'. It operates with coy and almost sickening force here, and the governess quickly consolidates her gains by running the full declension that began with *'bad'*: 'contaminate', and 'corrupt'.

All of the governess's speeches submit to this kind of analysis, but I want to clinch the matter with one final example that is particularly pertinent. The governess is by this time on her way to uncovering the fact that Miles was aware of the relationship between

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, and that he tried to conceal the fact of the relation for the sake of his friends. Now we know that Maisie Farrange has done the same thing for her friends in all innocence, but the governess of Bly is able to interpret it as something fiendish. She has Mrs. Grose cornered again and is questioning her with sadistic delight. She has just asked her if Miles never mentioned Quint in relation with Miss Jessel:

> 'She saw, visibly flushing, where I was coming out. "Well, he didn't show anything. He denied," she repeated; "he denied".
>
> 'Lord how I pressed her now! "So that you could see he knew what was between the two wretches?"
>
> ' "I don't know—I don't know!" the poor woman wailed.
>
> ' "You do know, you dear thing," I replied; "only you haven't my dreadful boldness of mind, and you keep back, out of timidity and modesty and delicacy, even the impression that in the past when you had, without my aid, to flounder about in silence, most of all made you miserable. But I shall get it out of you yet! There was something in the boy that suggested to you," I continued, "his covering and concealing their relation".
>
> ' "Oh he couldn't prevent——"
>
> ' "Your learning the truth? I daresay! But heavens!" I fell, with vehemence, a-thinking, "what it shows that they must, to that extent, have succeeded in making of him!"
>
> ' "Ah nothing that's not nice *now*!" Mrs. Grose lugubriously pleaded.
>
> ' "I don't wonder you looked queer!" I persisted, "when I mentioned to you the letter from his school." '

The manner in which the governess deflects the course of Mrs. Grose's thoughts from their original channel is particularly clear here. Obviously Mrs. Grose has been on the point of remarking that Miles could not have prevented Quint and Miss Jessel from meeting, but the governess characteristically interrupts for the purpose of making Mrs. Grose say something else—something more incriminating for Miles. And then with a skilful sideswoop she applies the effect of *that* towards building up the black suggestiveness of the headmaster's letter. It has been recently observed that the governess is a great symbolic religious figure offering herself as an expiatory victim for the children, but she seems more like a fit subject for euthanasia to me. In his preface James said of the governess, "We have surely as much of her own nature as we can swallow in watching it reflect her anxieties and inductions', and the words are exactly right. James's choice of the word 'inductions' seems especially pointed, for the governess never has any facts about Miles or Flora to deduce a case from. What she offers is a tissue of surmises built upon the slenderest possible quantity of evidence.

During the past several years it has become usual for American critics to dismiss Mr. Edmund Wilson's analysis of *The Turn of the*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Screw as inept, but it remains, in spite of an unfortunate emphasis on the question of the reality of the ghosts, the best thing we have on James's story. Mr. Wilson's Freudian interpretation of the actions of the governess is probably as good as any explanation is likely to be if we insist on a realistic one, even if one isn't partial to Freudian terms in literary criticism; and it is easy to see how those several difficult elements we noticed in Mrs. Wix's character —her erotic infatuation with Sir Claude and a questionable quality in her 'moral sense'—might easily have proved the seeds from which the governess of the following year developed. However that may be, the governess is intent on possessing the children in a way which, for both Hawthorne and James represented a violation of human personality. Westervelt, Chillingworth, Olive Chancellor, Gilbert Osmund, are all guilty of this crime in one way or another. It is the distinguishing mark of *The Turn of the Screw* (which it shares with *Ethan Brand* in Hawthorne's canon) that it attempts to abstract the crime from its individuating particularities in life, and present it in its horrible purity. The children are presented as charming types of innocence. Mr. Richard Chase (who nevertheless sees the children as corrupted) has remarked on the significance of their names. Miles is a little soldier, as his name indicates, while Flora's name suggests all the promise and loveliness of spring. (The withered fern, discussed below, makes its point more tellingly because of Flora's name.) On the other hand, the governess has no name. She is as anonymous as the persuasions and pressures of 'the world's artificial system', whose doctrines, as a teacher of innocence, she endeavours to inculcate in the children. There is nothing more pathetic in James's works than the way the children make a valiant but foredoomed attempt to escape from her tyranny. This is especially true of Miles, but particularly touching is Flora's little attempt to escape the suffocating surveillance of her teacher. Taking advantage of a moment of freedom (to which, incidentally, the chivalrous Miles may have helped her) the child has obeyed an instinctive impulse to go off by herself, and she has wandered down to the little lake at Bly. But her respite is a short one, for no Fury was ever more vigilant than the governess, who, dragging the long-suffering Mrs. Grose with her, presently tracks her down. The child sees them coming:

> 'Flora, a short way off, stood before us on the grass and smiled as if her performance had now become complete. The next thing she did, however, was to stoop down and pluck—quite as if it were all she was there for—a big ugly spray of withered fern'.

For a moment we have the image of a little martyr, even to the blessed palm. But this palm is ugly and withered, for it celebrates the hideous martyrdom of innocence. Flora is not to leave her childhood by the gradual maturing of knowledge as we have watched Maisie's powers of judgment and choice unfold into an exquisitely poised moral intuition. She is to become an 'old, old

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

woman' at a stroke—to have forcibly imposed on her mind all the guilty knowledge of a distorted maturity. For the governess's determination that Flora and Miles shall confess to *seeing* the demons that haunt her own vision is, in effect, a determination to shape their innocence to her guilt. For what are the demons but objective symbols of the governess's distorted 'moral sense'? *The Turn of the Screw* enacts for us the long siege of innocence, of the natural state of childhood, that is undertaken by the malign representatives of 'the world's artificial system'. After the governess has failed to make the little girl see the haggard, damned ghost of Miss Jessel at the lake's edge, she quotes Flora as crying: 'I don't know what you mean. I see nobody. I see nothing. I never *have*. I think you're cruel'. It gives us some idea—that 'I never have', with its use of the past tense—of all the children must have been through at the governess's hands, pressures, suggestions, and tyrannies that we aren't informed of; and it tells us how they must, with natural delicacy of perception, have sensed something of what, all this time, has been going on in the governess's mind.

The 'horrors' that the little girl speaks to Mrs. Grose a few pages later are authentic 'horrors' well enough. It is precisely those 'horrors' that the withered fern celebrated in anticipation. The governess has at last succeeded in giving Flora her own understanding of the world the children moved in with Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. And in doing so she has corrupted them far beyond anything within the power of the servants, whose memory has been so abused. Flora speaks 'horrors'; but what 'horrors' we are inclined to ask, might Maisie not have produced, if properly instructed, from the rich background provided by her familiar knowledge of her mother's lovers (Mr. Perriam, Lord Eric, the Captain, Mr. Tischbein); or from her weird meeting with Mrs. Cuddon, the hideous wealthy American mulatto who pays Maisie's father to be her lover; or from her association with her adulterous step-parents? But Maisie never speaks any 'horrors'. Her wonderful creative innocence is able to move through all her afflictions unscathed, and she finally achieves a fineness of moral knowledge far beyond anything within the range of Mrs. Wix's highly imperfect 'moral sense', which is based on a negative appreciation of guilt, itself partaking of the guilt it judges. Maisie's final triumph consists in the fact that she is able to resist this aspect of Mrs. Wix as successfully as she resists the contamination of Mrs. Beale; and when Maisie and Mrs. Wix go off together at the end of the novel, one knows that it is Mrs. Wix who will do all the learning in the future.

Before dropping this matter, I wish to say something more about the question of the ghosts that has so tormented critics. I have already quoted from James's *Preface*: ' . . . Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are not "ghosts" at all, as we now know the ghost, but goblins, elves, imps, demons as loosely constructed as those of the old trials for witchcraft . . .'. In other words, James's ghosts here are to be taken on the same level that we accept Hawthorne's ghosts: as supernatural agents having an accredited place in the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

story and promoting a moral meaning, but not raising the problem of belief or disbelief as such. I doubt if it would be profitable to discuss whether or not Judge Pyncheon in *The House of Seven Gables* was acting under the influence of that other classic piece of witchcraft supernaturalism, Maule's Curse. At any rate, one is quite willing to evaluate his action on its own merit without becoming involved in such questions as distract us from the real problems in *The Turn of the Screw*. What Peter Quint and Miss Jessel actually contribute to the action of the story, they contributed long before the arrival of our gruesome governess at Bly, when they walked the earth in flesh and used Miles and Flora as conveniences for their assignations. Mr. Wilson's essay indisputably establishes, I think, that no one except the governess sees the demons—but whether these demons that the governess 'evokes' are related, in anything but external appearance, to the dead persons they represent, *ought to be* highly problematical. The fact that Mr. Wilson has based his interpretation on a Freudian analysis of the governess may be a little irritating at first, but an extension of Mr. Wilson's theory actually provides the best logical explanation possible.[4] The governess's own repressions, projecting themselves externally in certain images, are actually endowed with the sanctions of objective supernatural evil. The governess 'evokes' by a kind of sympathetic magic demons that correspond to her own hidden evil. It is, then, the governess who is possessed, and her own possession becomes a type of the possession with which she threatens the children. But the demons threaten the children only indirectly, only insofar as they act through the governess. The governess's action is elevated in this way above the mere level of neurosis, but when the demons have performed this function of validating the governess's evil, they cease to matter in themselves.

This ambiguity amounts to trickery, of course—trickery of a kind that seems to me to be below the level of an artist of James's

[4]There is evidence to support Mr. Wilson's theory in addition to those instances of Freudian imagery which he cites. Returning from church on that fatal Sunday when Miles has asked her to get in touch with his uncle for the purpose of sending him again to school, the governess symbolically establishes her identity with Miss Jessel by 'sinking down at the foot of the staircase—suddenly collapsing there on the lowest step and then with a revulsion recalling that it was exactly where, more than a month before, and just so bowed with evil things, I had seen the spectre of the most horrible of women'. Mounting then to her own room, the identity so established continues to pursue the governess. She discovers the 'ghost' of Miss Jessel, seated at her own desk, like 'some housemaid' who is about to apply herself 'to the considerable effort of a letter to her sweetheart'. This *should* establish, if anything can, the nature of the repressed infatuation of the governess for her employer, and it shows how it lies at the centre of all her dealings with the children.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stature. And yet it is also more than trickery. It is the most tortuous exemplification in James's work of that tension between appearance and reality—or, in this case, a wanton wrenching apart of the two terms. There are a number of essential questions that simply cannot be answered without bringing to *The Turn of the Screw* that kind of attention which a work of art ought not to require. And yet the questions are not idle ones if one assumes that a work of art has a moral value. The whole meaning of *The Turn of the Screw* revolves around the question of whether the children are innocent or have been corrupted. But without resorting to evidence from another novel, *What Maisie Knew,* the question seems to me unanswerable. Appearance and reality have been separated in *The Turn of the Screw* to just this appalling extent. It is almost impossible to bring the problem of evil in the novel to a particular or significant focus because of this separation, and we are left with a story on our hands that, practically speaking, most readers will accept at the level of *The Lady or the Tiger.* And yet James seems to have been presenting for us here a parable that illustrates his profoundest meaning—a meaning, or a metaphysic, that would morally justify Maggie Verver's apotheosis of falsehood, as we analysed it in the earlier part of this paper. What James has, in effect, accomplished, is an undermining of the laws of evidence, and a destructive foray into the grounds for moral judgment. It will be profitable, I think, to conclude this study with a summary comparison between the moral worlds James offers us in the two novels that have been discussed here.

In *What Maisie Knew* Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale are living, morally responsible people who may be held accountable for their own acts, and the novel is the most magnificent portrayal in the language of the unfolding discretionary powers of a human being. *What Maisie Knew* presents us with a world of horror, but the essence of that horror consists in the way we are able to isolate the *grotesqueness* of moral evil as it caricatures and distorts human action and motive—to isolate it through the innocent eyes of a little girl whose vision is not sufficiently dulled by conventional experience to absorb the singularity of the irregular world in which she lives. *What Maisie Knew* seems to me by far the greatest novel of the later James—and second only, I think, to *The Portrait of a Lady* in the entire canon of James's work. In *Maisie* we have one of the most fully lighted moral worlds that James ever offered for our inspection. There is a steady and irreproachable correspondence between appearance and reality in this novel, but the relationship is not felt as static. It is realized with a complex density. There are no 'set' characters circulating dully around moral fixities, and yet their actions, and the judgments we are invited to pass on those actions, do suggest an intelligible moral framework for experience that corresponds to our own knowledge of the world.

In *The Turn of the Screw* this clarity is lost. Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale are killed off, and reappear as 'ghosts', whose past action we have no way of evaluating unless we are willing to accept the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conventional criticisms of Mrs. Grose, or the black interpretations of the horrible governess. We have entered a world of complete unreality in this novel in which, if we could grasp anything as solid even as ghost-flesh we should feel comparatively reassured. *The Turn of the Screw* is, of course, another attack on 'the world's artificial system', but the attack goes so deep that when the artificial system has been destroyed, it is doubtful if anything is left. Rather than the quotation from Hawthorne's *The New Adam and Eve* with which I opened this article, a different quotation from his story, *The Christmas Banquet,* would seem to apply to this novel. Hawthorne has caused one of his characters in this story, Gervayse Hastings, to describe the affliction which has placed him among the most unfortunate of men: 'It is a chillness—a want of earnestness—a feeling as if what should be my heart were a thing of vapor—a haunting perception of unreality! Thus seeming to possess all that other men have—all that men aim at—I have really possessed nothing, neither joy nor griefs. All things, all persons . . . have been like shadows flickering on the wall. It was so with my wife and children—with those who seemed my friends: it is so with yourselves, whom I see now before me. Neither have I myself any real existence, but am a shadow like the rest'. In *The Turn of the Screw* we almost seem to have entered Gervayse Hastings' world. Nothing is real, and we are sure of nothing. If Miles and Flora are innocent (and they undoubtedly are) their very innocence is a tragedy, for it is utterly incomprehensible to 'the world's artificial system', and their martyrdom is meaningless. 'It is only through the medium of the imagination', Hawthorne wrote, 'that we can lessen those iron fetters, which we call truth and reality, and make ourselves even partially sensible of what prisoners we are'. The trouble with *The Turn of the Screw* is simply that the fetters are lessened to such an extent that moral action seems to lose any intelligible form. We are confronted with a kind of chaos that appears to be controlled only by the artificial props of the story.

It would no doubt be possible to discuss the matter of this paper in another terminology than the one chosen here. But the terms, appearance and reality, point to the profoundly American character of the problem, and they illuminate still further the nature of the similarity between Hawthorne and Henry James. The conflict between appearance and reality obviously relates to what, in an earlier essay, I called the American Problem: that is, the conflict between America and Europe, and between the past and present. It is at the very heart of James's work, and analysis would show that the conflict, in one way or another, is the seed of most of James's stories. But it is those stories in which the conflict is kept within reasonable limits that are James's true masterpieces.

MARIUS BEWLEY.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JAMES'S 'WHAT MAISIE KNEW'

A DISAGREEMENT[1]

I AGREE with Mr. Bewley in setting a very high value on *What Maisie Knew*, the work, of those he discusses, in which I am most interested. Nevertheless I find myself protesting vehemently against his treatment of it. In fact the *What Maisie Knew* he offers us is not the *What Maisie Knew* I admire, and I am convinced that it is not James's. The parallel that Mr. Bewley proposes with *The Turn of the Screw* seems to me wholly invalid, and in the course of making it out he falsifies, I think, both his terms.

I am not myself much interested in the famous thriller, and such attention as I now give it is wholly incidental to the defence of *What Maisie Knew*. Not that I don't think *The Turn of the Screw* a success in its way. It achieves perfectly what James aimed at. It is a triumph, conceived in a spirit that Poe might have applauded, of calculating contrivance, and I cannot see why so much heavy weather should have been made of interpreting it as notoriously has been—even if James hadn't told us so plainly in the Preface the nature of the aim and the calculation.

For Mr. Bewley, of the two tales, *The Turn of the Screw* might almost seem to be the major concern. It is in the interest of his version of that story that he makes out the version of *What Maisie Knew* against which I protest.

> 'The whole meaning of *The Turn of the Screw* revolves around the question of whether the children are innocent or have been corrupted. But without resorting to evidence from another novel, *What Maisie Knew*, the question seems to me unanswerable. Appearance and reality have been separated in *The Turn of the Screw* to just this appalling extent. It is almost impossible to bring the problem of evil to a particular or significant focus because of this separation'.

Unless at the level of the play on the nerves of a Christmas ghost-story, I find nothing appalling about *The Turn of the Screw*, though on the other hand, I can't doubt that James means us to believe the children corrupted. The 'ambiguity' that Mr. Bewley examines as 'a destructive forcing into the grounds for moral judgment'—as demanding 'that kind of attention which a work of art ought not to require'—is created, it seems to me, by Mr. Bewley himself, and I find the ingenuity of the creating, the way in which he

[1]Mr. Bewley has invited me to elaborate certain dissentient remarks of mine on his essay. The circumstances have not allowed him an opportunity to rejoin.—F.R.L.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

arrives at his 'evoked' demons, with the odd elusive status he attributes to them, astonishingly perverse. The actual inferiority of *The Turn of the Screw* is a less interesting affair than that which we are asked to contemplate.

If it is 'impossible to bring the problem of evil to a particular or significant focus' in *The Turn of the Screw*, that is because, in that story, 'evil' had no particular significance for James. When he tells us, in the *Preface*, that Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are not *'ghosts' at all, that is not by way of making it possible for us to believe (which is Mr. Bewley's suggestion) that the bodily valet and governess might very well have been quite unsinister.* He has already told us that 'this perfectly . . . irresponsible little fiction is a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an *amusette* to catch those not easily caught', and he is explaining how his *ad hoc* inventions, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, have the function of producing a given kind of effect:

> 'They would be agents, in fact: there would be laid on them the dire duty of causing the situation to reek with the air of Evil'.

The nature of his interest here in Evil he makes perfectly plain:

> 'Portentous evil—how was I to save that, as an intention on the part of my demon-spirits, from the drop, the comparative vulgarity, inevitably attending throughout the whole range of possible brief illustration, the offered example, the imputed vice, the cited act, the limited deplorable presentable instance? To bring the bad dead back to life for a second round of badness is to warrant them as indeed prodigious, and to become hence as shy of specifications as of a waiting anti-climax'.

Peter Quint, then, and Miss Jessel are the consistently bad ghosts of bad persons—James is explicit about it (if that were necessary). Again:

> 'What, in the last analysis, had I to give the sense of? Of their being, the haunting pair, capable, as the phrase is, of everything—that is, of exerting, in respect to the children, the very worst action small victims so conditioned might be conceived as subject to'.

But though James would seem to leave us in no doubt as to the status he intends for the 'haunting pair' as actors in the drama, and agents of portentous evil, he nevertheless doesn't care what we conceive the evil to be, so long as we feel the situation to 'reek with the air' of it. He has no particular vision or felt significance pressing for definition. His idea is to trick us into generating for ourselves the dire 'significance' that—where these things are in question—we find most congenial:

> 'Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough, I said to myself—and that already is a charming job—and his own imagination, his own sympathy (with the children) and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

horror (of their false friends) will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him *think* the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications'.

Mr. Bewley, with so many other readers, justifies James's reckoning. And yet James, I am sure, would have been surprised at the perversity that focuses the evil, not in the 'haunting pair', but in the governess. And Mr. Bewley, we know, has not been alone in doing that. For this perversity (may I say?) I see no real excuse; but for an explanation why it should have been possible we can invoke, I think, the quality that makes *The Turn of the Screw* so limited in interest—the story has no ponderable significance; it is a mere thriller: 'my values', says James, 'are positively all blanks save so far as an excited horror, a promoted pity, a created expertness . . . proceed to read into them more or less fantastic figures'. A non-significant thriller, done, nevertheless, with the subtlety of the great master, will naturally tend to escape recognition for what it is, and to get its subtlety accepted by some admirers of James as being of another order—the servant, that is, of some intended significance: hence ingenuities of interpretation and the discovery of radical ambiguities.

All the same I am very much surprised that Mr. Bewley should be still able to think Mr. Edmund Wilson's interpretation worth invoking in support. For when the 'unfortunate emphasis on the reality of the ghosts' has been dealt with, what is left? Since, as critics have pointed out—*e.g.* A. J. A. Waldock and (see *Partisan Review* for February, 1949) Oliver Evans—Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper, recognizes the dead valet in the highly specific description of the sinister intruder given by the governess, who had never before heard of Peter Quint, it is hard to see why Mr. Bewley should go on explaining the apparitions as somehow 'evoked' by the governess in consequence of her alleged infatuation with her master. Or rather, one can see that his 'evoked', and the corresponding odd status attributed to the 'demons', represents Mr. Bewley's attempt to accept, at the same time, both Edmund Wilson's theory and the conclusive criticism of it. But I have to insist that Mr. Bewley himself has invented that equivocal status, and the kind of ambiguity or trickery with which he credits James.

From Edmund Wilson he takes over too that remarkable misrepresentation of the 'authority' that James, in the Preface, tells us he has given the governess. It hadn't occurred to James that he might be taken to be encouraging a view of the governess that credits her with a capacity for mesmeric moral bullying. All he means (as Oliver Evans points out) is that he has invested her with authority for the reader, who will know that he is to trust her implicitly.

But the refutation of Mr. Bewley's reading of *The Turn of the Screw* doesn't depend on anything that James *tells* us. We need only, without distorting preconceptions, read the story itself. Mr. Bewley will not mind my saying that his *parti pris* finds major support in an ignorance of English possibilities that he shares with

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Wilson. Elaborating his case against the governess he says:

> 'One can study his method at its absolutely representative level in Chapter II, in which she receives the letter from Miles's headmaster, saying that the boy is dismissed from his school. Neither the governess nor ourselves ever know the facts of the case, and there is no reason for magnifying the incident into an incriminating episode. Mr. Edmund Wilson has rightly remarked in his essay, *The Ambiguity of Henry James*, that the governess "colours" the dismissal "on no evidence at all, with a significance somehow sinister".'

But James, by the time he wrote the story, was Englishman enough to know that no English headmaster would have dared to expel a boy—and a boy belonging to a family of a distinguished 'County' standing—without being prepared to substantiate against him as grave a charge as the governess divines from the letter.

> 'With no evidence to go on except an extremely ambiguous letter, and with a great deal to contradict her, the governess is yet able in an incredibly short space to present Miles as, in all probability, vicious . . .'

The evidence of the letter, for an English reader, must tell very heavily indeed; and as for the 'great deal that contradicts' it, there we have James's theme under the aspect that answers to Mr. Bewley's general formula: the conflict between appearance and reality. The children look so angelically good, but their very 'innocence', in its sustained imperturbability, is a measure of their corruption. That is the peculiar horror (the thrill focussed in the brave governess's agonized sense of isolation and helplessness) that James intends as the note of *The Turn of the Screw*.

We have the note sharply enough defined in the scene in which Miles deliberately—it is unmistakable—turns on his 'innocence' with special intensity and holds the governess entranced while he performs on the piano, with the result that she forgets to keep watch on Flora, who is thus enabled to slip away and keep an assignation with the female 'demon', Miss Jessel. The 'innocent' charm of the boy is really poised and sinister calculation, the antithesis of child-like: that is what unquestionably (it seems to me) we are meant to feel. As for Flora's depravity, the housekeeper (will Mr. Bewley argue that she is bullied into it?) bears fully explicit testimony to that in her talk with the governess after the scene by the lake.

The attempt to establish a parallel doesn't, then, generate light: I hope I have said enough about *The Turn of the Screw* to enforce that judgment. But it is the consequences, or concomitants, of that attempt for *What Maisie Knew* that I care about. That Mr. Bewley should stultify (as I see it) James's intention by preserving the innocence of Miles and Flora doesn't trouble me much, so little being at stake; but when he projects Evil into *What Maisie Knew* I brace myself for a stern repelling action. For with 'portentous evil' (to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

use James's own phrase) James is not at all concerned in that masterpiece. With squalor, yes; but that is another matter. The tone and mode of *What Maisie Knew*—this is what one has to insist on—are those of an extraordinarily high-spirited comedy. The comedy doesn't exclude pathos, that is true; but the pathos bears no relation to that of *The Turn of the Screw*. It is no more the pathos of innocence assailed or surrounded by *evil* than the distinctive pathos of the early part of *David Copperfield* is that.

This comparison has point, for the idea, the treatment—and how do we distinguish treatment from theme here?—of *What Maisie Knew* would pretty obviously not have been conceived by James if he hadn't read *David Copperfield*. It was in Dickens that he found the tip that taught him how he might deal, in this kind of comedy, with his moral and emotional intensities—those to which he was moved by his glimpses of late Victorian Society. It is not too much to say that he had at times been horrified by these glimpses: there is a letter of the 'eighties in which, shocked by a peculiarly repellent scandal of the day, he prophesies for Great Britain an equivalent (it would appear) of the French Revolution. The note of moral horror is to be found in *A London Life* (1888), where the horror is registered in the innocent consciousness of Laura, the nubile American girl who has to watch the career of her married sister, the Society beauty, in the fastest London *beau monde*, a career resembling Maisie's mamma's. But over against Laura is her friend, old Lady Davenant, who, far from registering moral horror, takes a Regency attitude towards the scandals. James's own attitude has enough of her in it to produce the witty and satirical treatment in which *A London Life* relates closely to *What Maisie Knew*. He suggests, however, in the story, a third attitude besides Laura's and Lady Davenant's. We have it when Laura asks herself:

> 'Was she wrong after all—was she cruel by being too rigid? . . . It was not the first time the just measure seemed to slip from her hands as she became conscious of possible, or rather of very actual differences of standard and usage. On this occasion Geordie and Ferdie asserted themselves, by the mere force of lying asleep upstairs in their little cribs, as on the whole the just measure'.

This hint is developed in *What Maisie Knew*; the hint that the criterion of judgment must be the consequences for the children. Instead of developing it in *A London Life* he takes the opportunity for satiric humour offered by the pair of hearty and insensitive cubs, who are obviously going, not to suffer, but to belong happily and whole-heartedly to their class and kind.

The next story to consider when we are inquiring into the genesis of *What Maisie Knew* is *The Pupil* (1891), which James reprinted for the Collected Edition in the same volume as *Maisie* and with which he associated it in the Preface in an account that bears out my case. There is a clear relation between Laura's rôle of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

critical innocence in a world of moral squalor and the joint rôles of the pupil, Morgan Moreen, and his unfortunate exploited tutor, Pemberton. Moreover Morgan, the precociously intelligent and incorruptibly nice child, develops a potentiality of pathos that one perhaps hardly registers as such in the brace of hearty, healthy young cubs in *A London Life*. But in *The Pupil* we no longer have the note of horror; the squalor the story deals in is not of a kind to evoke any sense of 'portentous evil', and it is not sexual. Except for not paying their bills the Moreens are intensely respectable. In fact—it should be plain once the suggestion has been made—they are the Micawbers translated higher in the social scale and given a cosmopolitan setting; seen, also, too fully for what they are to be presented with a warmly sympathetic humour. James has unmistakably found his inspiration in Dickens.

When we come to *What Maisie Knew* we see that the hint now has been taken from David himself; David—'only Brooks of Sheffield'—puzzling over the banter of Mr. Murdstone's friends, and David the Micawbers' lodger, the small child deprived of parents and committed to a paradoxical kind of adulthood among adults—small child and man-of-the-world:

> 'I never can understand whether my precocious self-dependence confused Mrs. Micawber in reference to my age, or whether she was so full of the subject that she would have talked about it to the very twins if there had been no one else to communicate with . . .'

So prompted, James achieves a remarkable economy, which brings at the same time a rich gain in positive values. In Maisie we may say we have Laura, the innocent girl of *A London Life*, but this time bringing to the part the innocence of actual childhood. Morgan, the 'pupil', with his precociously developed moral perception and his sensitive integrity, has come in between, contributing obvious elements to the conception of Maisie, in whom, moreover, we have once again the pathos. And James, looking back on *The Pupil* in the light of his new conception, has seen that he doesn't need Pemberton, the tutor, or any equivalent adult observer and commentator.

The whole is presented through Maisie—through her developing awareness and understanding. The thing might seem to be impossibly difficult, and it is done with almost incredible perfection.

> 'It was to be the fate of this patient little girl to see much more than she at first understood, but also even at first to understand much more than any little girl however patient, had perhaps ever understood before . . . She was, taken into the confidence of passions on which she fixed just the stare she might have had for images bounding across the wall in the slide of a magic-lantern. Her little world was phantasmagoric—strange shadows dancing on a sheet. It was as if the whole performance had been given for her—a mite of a half-scared infant in a great dim theatre'.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The performance as apprehended by the child, with her growing powers, in her phantasmagoric little world, and fitted more and more with meanings, is evoked with astonishing vividness and economy:

> 'By the time she had grown sharper, as the gentlemen who had criticized her calves used to say, she found in her mind a collection of images and echoes to which meanings were attachable —images and echoes kept for her in the childish dusk, the dim closet, the high drawers, like games she wasn't yet big enough to play. The great strain meanwhile was that of carrying by the right end the things her father said about her mother—things mostly, indeed, that Moddle, on a glimpse of them, as if they had been complicated toys or difficult books, took out of her hands and put away in the closet. A wonderful assortment of objects of this kind she was to discover there later, all tumbled up too with the things, shuffled into the same receptacle, that her mother had said about her father'.

The things that Maisie hears and sees are much of the order of those which horrified Laura in *A London Life*, but *What Maisie Knew*, in tone, is even more removed from that earliest of the three stories than *The Pupil* is. Inspired by the hint from Dickens, this un-Dickensian genius has found a way of treating without the note of horror matter from which it might seem to be inseparable so long as there was to be no sacrifice of moral intensity. And that *What Maisie Knew* is a happy example of marked moral intensity no admirer will question. But to suggest as Mr. Bewley does in making his comparison that *What Maisie Knew* like *The Turn of the Screw* deals with evil is to convey an utterly false impression. It deals with moral squalor; with ugly conduct that from some approaches might very well be brought under 'depravity'; but this last term suggests a vibration that is absent from *What Maisie Knew*. Though sexual misconduct, adultery, figures so centrally, it has clearly evoked as such no noticeable moral thrill in James—no marked interest for itself, in fact; though a creative writer's moral preoccupation could hardly be more intent and penetrating than James's is here. What we are given is comedy; where adulterous relations are concerned, the comedy of 'history repeating itself':

> '. . . an upright scarlet plume, as to the ownership of which Maisie was instantly eager. "Who is she?—who is she?"
>
> But Mrs. Beale for a moment only looked after them. "The liar—the liar!"
>
> Maisie considered. "Because he's not—where one thought?" That was also, a month ago in Kensington Gardens, where her mother had not been. "Perhaps he has come back", she said.
>
> "He never went—the hound!"
>
> That, according to Sir Claude, had been also what her mother had not done, and Maisie could only have a sense of something that in a maturer mind would be called the way history repeats itself.
>
> "Who *is* she?" she asked again'.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In its central aspect it is the comedy of a child's innocence; a comedy that, while being so high-spirited, is at the same time, and essentially, a rendering of the pathos of Maisie's situation:

> 'She therefore recognized the hour that in troubled glimpses she had long foreseen, the hour when—the phrase for it came back to her from Mrs. Beale—with two fathers, two mothers and two homes, six protections in all, she shouldn't know "wherever" to go'.

There is no tendency to the sentimental in this pathos. Perhaps the distinctive quality of it as, in its astringent purity and strength, the extraordinarily subtle methods of James's comedy disengage it from the given situation, is better suggested by the following passage, which, with its 'bread and butter', has an obvious symbolic force:

> 'The next moment, however, he laughed gaily enough. "My dear lady, you exaggerate tremendously *my* poor needs". Mrs. Wix had once mentioned to her young friend that when Sir Claude called her his dear lady he could do anything with her; and Maisie felt a certain anxiety to see what he would do now. Well, he only addressed her a remark of which the child herself was aware of feeling the force. "Your plan appeals to me immensely; but of course—don't you see?—I shall have to consider the position I put myself in by leaving my wife".
>
> "You'll also have to remember", Mrs. Wix replied, "that if you don't look out your wife won't give you time to consider. Her ladyship will leave *you*".
>
> "Ah my good friend, I do look out!" the young man returned while Maisie helped herself afresh to bread and butter. "Of course if that happens I shall have somehow to turn round; but I hope with all my heart it won't. I beg your pardon", he continued to his stepdaughter, "for appearing to discuss that sort of possibility under your sharp little nose. But the fact is I *forget* half the time that Ida's your sainted mother".
>
> "So do I!" said Maisie, her mouth full of bread and butter and to put him in the right.
>
> Her protectress, at this, was upon her again. "The little desolate precious pet!" '

The strength of the pathos, as of the comedy in which it finds its felicitous definition, is the strength of the affirmation of positive values that it conveys. We have it here, the affirmation; the normative concern with a concept of an essential human goodness: ' "So do I!" said Maisie, her mouth full of bread and butter and to put him more in the right.'—The comedy of that 'So do I!' is a far subtler thing than the isolated passage might suggest. Our response, as we read the passage in its context, is neither her 'protectress's' (Mrs. Wix), nor the antithesis, which would be a snigger, but something more complex.

Maisie is good. She represents a positive concept of goodness, though we have no difficulty in taking her as an actual individual

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

little girl. Mr. Bewley, of course, is far from wishing to dispute this proposition. Nevertheless I have to protest against the misrepresentation involved in his attempt at assimilating Maisie to the children of *The Turn of the Screw*: it is to me a more striking illustration of the power of a wrong-headed preconception to distort than his presentment (utterly baseless, I think) of the governess as a neurotically cunning moral bully who insinuates ideas into the mind of the unsuspecting housekeeper. He writes:

> '. . . we find that the essence of Miles's offence consists in his having lied to Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper at Bly, concerning his familiarity with Peter Quint. And it is obvious that his reason for doing so is to shield Quint's and Miss Jessel's assignations from the prying curiosity of the other servants. This fact, when the governess learns of it from Mrs. Grose, is interpreted by her in the blackest possible colours for little Miles. But we must remember that this "sin" is precisely the one of which Maisie has been guilty. Surrounded by adulterous lovers, Maisie has never failed to lie for them when necessary—to lie valiantly, scrupulously, innocently'.

But on what evidence does Mr. Bewley assert so roundly that Maisie lies, and lies 'for' the 'adulterous lovers'? That we are to think of Miles and Flora as practising deliberate cunning deceit, and doing so in collusion with the depraved haunting couple, I do not see how we can doubt, if we take without *parti pris* what James gives us. But it seems to me that on the evidence of the text Maisie wholly deserves the tribute that Sir Claude pays her: 'I know when people lie—and that's what I've loved in you, that you never do'. And this is the worst that she can bring against herself: 'There had been times when she had had to make the best of the impression that she was deceitful; yet she had never concealed anything bigger than a thought'. 'For Maisie moreover', we have been told, 'concealment had never necessarily seemed deception; she had grown up among things as to which her foremost knowledge was that she was never to ask about them'.

Maisie doesn't lie. And that Mr. Bewley can suggest that the 'pacific art of stupidity' she does practise amounts to lying, and that she practises it in the interest of adulterous lovers, merely shows how disastrously infelicitous are the generalizing preoccupations that can attempt to parallel *What Maisie Knew* with *The Turn of the Screw* as dealing in evil, horror and sexual depravity. This sufficiently explicit key passage occurs early in *What Maisie Knew* (it opens the second paragraph of Chapter II):

> 'The theory of her stupidity, eventually embraced by her parents, corresponded with a great deal in her small still life: the complete vision, private but final, of the strange office she filled. It was literally a moral revolution accomplished in the depths of her nature. The stiff dolls on the dusky shelves began to move their legs and arms; old forms and phases began to have a sense that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

frightened her. She had a new feeling, the feeling of danger, on which a new remedy rose to meet it, the idea of an inner self or, in other words, concealment. She puzzled out with imperfect signs, but with a prodigious spirit, that she had been a centre of hatred and a messenger of insult, and that everything was bad because she had been employed to make it so. Her parted lips locked themselves with the determination to be employed no longer'.

She acts with more and more subtlety on 'her little instinct of keeping the peace'. We have the comedy and also 'the small strange pathos on the child's part of an innocence so saturated with knowledge and so directed to diplomacy'. But the 'little instinct of keeping the peace' is more than that; it is the agent of a positive judgment that develops as we watch it more and more discrimination. Hatred, malice, desire to wound or humiliate or make uncomfortable—these are what Maisie resolves she will not lend herself to. And we see this kind of discrimination, as it becomes more experienced, becoming a surer and surer judgment of personality. There are poignant conflicts when judgment cannot square with established loyalties and pieties, but, though these conflicts promote the growth that brings greater subtlety, judgment never loses: that is Maisie's moral genius, which it is an extraordinary proof of James's genius to make us accept so unhesitatingly.

She exercises her 'art of stupidity' against her beloved Sir Claude, after the encounter with Ida and the Captain in Kensington Gardens. She does so, partly because 'His conversation with her mother had clearly drawn blood, and the child's old horror came back to her, begetting the instant moral contraction of the days when her parents had looked to her to feed their love of battle'; but also because she had seen the Captain to be a kind, loyal and innocent soul (whatever conventional morality might have to say about him).

These judgments, personal and real as they are, represent the only morality she can conceive, as comes out in the comedy, with its characteristic pathos, of her parting exchange with the Captain:

> ' "Goodbye". Maisie kept his hand long enough to add, "I like you too". And then supremely: "You *do* love her?"
> "My dear child—!" The Captain wanted words.
> "Then don't do it only for just a little".
> "A little?"
> "Like all the others".
> "All the others?"—he stood staring.
> She pulled away her hand, "Do it always!" '

This particular effect gets its completion in the farewell scene with Ida at Folkstone, when Maisie is moved to 'horror', 'the first flare of anger that had ever yet lighted her face for a foe', by her mother's reception of a reference to the Captain (' "I thought you liked him".—"Him!—the biggest cad in London!" ').

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The education we see Maisie undergoing is exemplified in the change of her attitude towards her old governess—that one who marries her father. In nothing does James's art, on reflection, astonish us more than in his power of giving us in so short a space (*What Maisie Knew* is only a *nouvelle*) Maisie growing up from little more than an infant to almost an adult. Miss Overmore's beauty and elegance had charmed her little pupil. Maisie continues to be under the spell, but we watch her, as she develops, becoming more and more critical, and more and more conscious of being critical, of the personality behind the beauty and the elegance. Finally, in the close of the book, the erstwhile governess being now Mrs. Beale and Sir Claude's mistress, Maisie pronounces definitively against her—at the moment when Mrs. Beale lays herself out to play a fully maternal rôle.

Mrs. Wix has neither beauty nor elegance; in fact, in a Dickensian way (she fairly obviously derives from Dickensian inspiration) she is positively ugly. She represents good nature, affectionateness and maternal feeling, these virtues being altogether unrecommended by external advantages. On first acquaintance Maisie suffers a revulsion, and the significance of its being so quickly and finally overcome is emphasized by the episode of Mrs. Cuddon. Maisie sees that Mrs. Cuddon is kind; she divines an essential, if obscure, resemblance to the Captain. But the poor lady's ugliness is too much for the child, who repels her advances, and shudders away with a wounding obviousness.

The virtues, then, that Mrs. Wix represents are solid and strongly self-recommendatory, and she represents too (unlike Mrs. Cuddon, who is keeping Maisie's papa) respectability—as Mr. Bewley notes. He notes it, but nevertheless he makes an attack on her respectability that is perhaps the oddest of the perversities (so they seem to me) of his treatment of *What Maisie Knew*.

> 'Elderly, ugly, fantastic as she is, Mrs. Wix falls in love with Sir Claude. The fact isn't insisted on, and it might even be possible to interpret in non-erotic terms her passionate avowal to Maisie that she "adores" Sir Claude, although I doubt it'.

And Mr. Bewley talks of Mrs. Wix's 'erotic infatuation'. But I venture that he finds no difficulty about interpreting in non-erotic terms Maisie's passionate avowal that she 'adores' Sir Claude—as she clearly does. It should surely be plain enough (even if we hadn't James's note to that effect) that Mrs. Wix's and Maisie's 'adorations' are of the same order. Girl and woman, it is true, are both females, and Sir Claude is an attractive man, and 'erotic' in these days is a term of extensive and uncertain application. But it is surely a very odd term to apply to poor Mrs. Wix's state, and the context given it by Mr. Bewley adds to the emphasis with which it must be rejected.

> 'The atmosphere of "horror" in Maisie is one of its solid achievements, more substantial and enduring than the "horror"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of *The Turn of the Screw*, and these touches in Mrs. Wix, however they are to be interpreted in other respects, add their own contribution to that atmosphere'.

I, as I have said, detect no atmosphere of 'horror' in *What Maisie Knew* and I see Mrs. Wix's adoration of Sir Claude sufficiently defined in such a passage as this:

> 'He laughed back at Mrs. Beale; he looked at such moments quite as Mrs. Wix, in the long stories she told her pupil, always described the lovers of her distressed beauties—"the perfect gentleman and strikingly handsome".'

Sir Claude, in short, is the *beau idéal* of her romantic daydreams, and her feeling about him is as much, and as little, 'erotic' as Maisie's, if more positively a matter of comedy—since, after all, a childish 'adoration' in her is less in place than in a child. I concede to Mr. Bewley, without embarrassment, that perhaps Maisie as well as Mrs. Wix is jealous of Mrs. Beale.

An element of jealousy may contribute to Maisie's decision to go back to England with Mrs. Wix. But I have to insist that sex, in this story, is only marginal to James's preoccupation; he shows, here, no moral feeling at all that is directed upon sex as such. The absence of such feeling is an essential condition of the kind of poignant comedy in which, in this story, his genius manifests itself. Think, for instance, of the way in which, in the closing act at Boulogne, it is conveyed to us that Sir Claude has spent the night with Mrs. Beale. Preparing, in the morning, to go out for breakfast with Maisie, Sir Claude looks for his stick.

> ' "A moment—my stick."
> But there appeared to be no stick. "No matter, I left it—oh!" He remembered with an odd drop and came out.
> "You left it in London?" she asked as they went downstairs.
> "Yes—in London: fancy!" '

It is in Mrs. Beales room. There is no hint here of any moral intensity directed upon sexual misconduct (the context makes that plain), or of enough interest in it as such to lead to moral judgment about it at all. The moral sense that James defines and conveys in this story is that focused in Maisie, of whom, Mr. Bewley will agree, it is not paradoxical to say that, though her attitude towards Sir Claude is feminine right enough, she remains to the end uninterested in, and uncognizant of, sex. Her discriminations and judgments regard the qualities of personality and the capacities for sensitive personal relations revealed by her adults as they perform the evolutions that are so largely set off by the spring of which she remains unaware. The 'moral sense' that Maisie can't produce for Mrs. Wix's satisfaction is the one that, in the world of *What Maisie Knew*, doesn't matter. The satire that plays upon it appeals for its positives to the sense defined in Maisie herself.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To come back to the drama at Boulogne: Maisie sees that Sir Claude is lying and that he is ashamed of his relations with Mrs. Beale. Though she may not put it to herself so, she has divined that for Mrs. Beale she figures as a mere convenience. And at this point I may remark that Mr. Bewley's account of *What Maisie Knew* as a struggle for the possession of Maisie badly misrepresents the case. Maisie, for the parties with a 'claim' to her, is a burden to be shifted, or a means (if retained for a limited period) of annoying the other, or a possible convenience. In the final act at Boulogne she is for Mrs. Beale a mere convenience; and we need not suspect Sir Claude, for all his playful description of himself as a born nurse, of being moved by any overbearing maternal, or paternal, passion. He is kind, he has a sense of decency and a conscience, and he likes Maisie; but he clearly has doubts about the convenience her presence in a *ménage à trois* would in sum be, as well as about the decency. The only party who may be supposed really to want Maisie is Mrs. Wix, as Maisie has sufficiently ascertained—to note which fact is to complete the explanation why, when it has become plain that kindness and sense of decency will not avail to separate Sir Claude from Mrs. Beale in order that he may perform his assumed duty by his stepchild, she opts for Mrs. Wix.

The reason that Mr. Bewley gives for that choice—it would surely have to be thought of as James's reason rather than Maisie's—is that (it being 'Maisie's mission in life to educate her elders') 'of the people struggling for possession of Maisie in the concluding chapter only poor Mrs. Wix remains amenable to education'. This suggestion seems to me to be jarringly out of resonance with the whole distinctive tone and spirit of the tale, which, for all its preoccupation with triumphant goodness, is so convincing in its realism. I see no reason at all for supposing that Mrs. Wix's ' "moral sense" is capable of being educated into fineness'. She will go on in her honest muddled conventionality; affectionately admiring Maisie's 'goodness' on the one hand, and knowing, on the other, that nothing matters more than a 'moral sense' in her own sense. And perhaps—may we not reflect?—it is as well that Maisie, after the childhood that has provided us with James's comedy, should enter adolescence under that kind of respectable tutelage.

F. R. LEAVIS.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors of Scrutiny.

Dear Sirs,

Mr. John Speirs is to be praised for taking an unscholastic line with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and for stressing the need for a simple edition without the formidable apparatus which has surrounded the poem until now. After all, we are permitted to enjoy *Troilus and Criseyde* without notes and analogues and it is very little harder to enjoy the English of Sir Gawain, especially—as Mr. Speirs points out—if the old orthography is not retained. There is no need for the poetry-seasoned reader to know the meaning of every word in either poem, unless he is under the unhappy necessity of turning them into 'idiomatic modern English'. But healthy though it sounds, this desire for a popular edition is not quite free from cant. For how many readers who are not literary students ever read *Troilus and Criseyde?* Very few. Yet the poem is generally available in a civilized form. The truth of the matter is that great poems which are long or in any way difficult—*Troilus* or *Sir Gawain* or *The Faerie Queene* or *The Prelude*—are in any case read properly only by people interested enough to take trouble over them. Perhaps it is better to take the little trouble needed to read Sir Gawain in any edition—(it is really not much harder than Chaucer)—than to have it rediscovered for us on the Third Programme.

Mr. Speirs is right. The local experts do tend to separate Middle English literature from the main stream. But textual scholarship is a red-herring in any 'literary-critical' argument and for Mr. Speirs it seems to be a red rag as well. When he shows his hand we see that the issue is not really between the bedevilled text and the fine poem but between the poem as a story and the poem as a myth. 'It seems probable that the author had consciously in mind—may himself have witnessed—the ritual the story of which underlies the poem. This underlying ritual and the poet's belief in its value as myth is what gives the poem its life'.

Now this will never do. Mr. Speirs seems not quite easy himself, for after a detailed survey of the poem in ritual terms he says that we must remember that though the poet begins with a myth he ends with a poem. But he did not begin with a myth. He began with stories that had once been a myth—a very different thing. The anthropologists and the literary critics influenced by their theories seem never to draw the obvious and necessary distinction between the prosaic and practical object of rites, and the romantic aftermath in which an appreciation of their strangeness and their literary qualities has replaced a literal belief in their efficacy. It is one thing to *believe* in goblins: it is another thing to *enjoy* goblins. The first is primitive, the second sophisticated. As Mr. Speirs points out, *Sir Gawain* is a highly sophisticated poem. Its author has frankly made

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

literary capital out of the strange stuff of the past, just as numerous other writers on both sides of the channel were doing. The reason for the excellence of the Gawain story is not because its author knew or believed in the magic of the old religion—(he probably knew less about it than the modern anthropologist)—but because he understood the nature of story-telling with an insight strictly comparable to the complex outlook of a modern novelist. He did not start from a myth: he started from stories, those numerous and tedious French analogues which Mr. Speirs is right to play down, and which are themselves relics, romantic exploitations of ritualistic beliefs and personages.

When a remarkable intellect and poetic talent take over a folk-tale, complexity and variety and food for thought come bursting out of every incident: a plot becomes a story, a complete thing. It happened when Shakespeare took over the plot of *King Lear* and *The Merchant of Venice,* and it happened when our author took up the threads of the Green Knight and Beheading Game stories. And just as the Märchen elements in his plots can be an embarrassment to Shakespeare, so they are to the author of Sir Gawain. As Mr. Speirs points out, the cause of all the trouble in the story—Morgan's envy of Guinevere—is quite perfunctory. But Morgan is a realistic old woman, the Green Knight is a realistic and hospitable landowner. The story in fact lies outside the plot. We get all the dramatic elements of story, the romantic aftermath which succeeds the bare events. And in his dismissal of the story (which he does not distinguish from the plot), Mr. Speirs seems to have missed the real reason for the complete absence of the sinister in Morgan, in the Green Knight, and in their castle. It is the excellent dramatic reason that Sir Gawain finds nothing sinister there. For him the castle is a superb contrast to the bleakness of the country through which he has come and the grimness of the tryst to which he is bound. Why find a ritualistic rather than a dramatic reason for this contrast? The irony is that Sir Gawain does not know until the end that castle and chapel are one, and by that time we have had all the pleasure of the contrast—(for the audience, like Gawain, does not know either)—ending with the sophisticated sting in the tail when we realize that Gawain's high Arthurian morals have indeed been tested in the most complex and bewildering way. The story is over then, and it does not matter that we *know* quite well that the Green Knight would never have killed Gawain, even if he had failed the test, just as we know that Long John Silver would never have cut Jim Hawkins's throat. The trouble about a good story is that one will never accept the logic of its events as one will accept them in a Police Report: one is too interested in the properties.

All the ritual evidence that we can discover or conjecture in the Boron and Vulgate cycles and in romances like *Perlesvaus* and Chrestien's *Percival,* is clear gain; they are not great enough as literature to have emancipated themselves as *Sir Gawain* is emancipated. The Green Knight and the old woman and the young, who repre-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sent for Mr. Speirs the vegetation god and the old and new year, have in fact grown clear of any such primitive relationship. The great green axe is no longer a fertility symbol but an immortal property of story, like the armour of Achilles, or the emeralds which Dorothea Brooke tried to feel religious about, or Long John Silver's wooden leg.

Our best line is to appreciate the author of *Sir Gawain* by the same literary canons as we appreciate his contemporary Chaucer. Both were highly-conscious artists of wide reading and erudition. In the symbolism of the Gawain poem warmth contrasts with cold, hunting with love-making, the homely with the unknown, just as the cold impersonal siege contrasts with the helpless intimacy of the lovers in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the affairs of the Rostov family with the winter campaign in *War and Peace*. *Sir Gawain* has all the size of the fictional world, and it belongs to such a world, not to *The Golden Bough*.

Details like the blood on the snow, with which the theory of ritual makes such play, show nothing more than that the author was a poet with an eye to colour effects. Compare the colour-sense in the *Mabinogion* or for that matter Chaucer's Venus 'fleeting in the clere green sea', or his King Emetreus 'with eyen bright citryn'. And the relish for strangeness and for queer detail which the Gawain author shows in his description of Green Chapel and Green Knight is of the same mediæval order as Chaucer's description of the temples of Mars and Saturn in *The Knight's Tale* ('The Northren Light in at the dores shoon'). The landscape near Sir Grey-Steel's home in that admirable romance *Eger and Grime* is almost as 'realized' as the landscape in *Sir Gawain*, but it does not occur to us to associate it with waste lands from which gods have been withdrawn any more than we associate Stevenson's Treasure Island, with its grey sand and pines and gloomy holm-oaks, with such phenomena. When Ritual is transformed into Romance it *is* transformed: there are no loose ends left over.

JOHN BAYLEY.
Oxford.

Mr. Speirs replies:

Mr. Bayley can speak of 'literary qualities', a 'relish for strangeness' and 'the strange stuff of the past' out of which our author has 'frankly made literary capital'. It is, of course, not the first time that I have heard these phrases, but I find it hard to attach any meaning to them which does not seem to me to involve a misconception of literature. I suppose we both see in any work of art a pattern or structure. But we seem to differ in how we would account for—and therefore in how we take account of—that structure, how it was built up and what it was built up of. Unless we believe in 'pure art'—which I take to mean believing that the pattern may somehow exist in itself and by itself for admiration—we will believe that it is a pattern or structure *of* something. I am not content with Mr. Bayley's 'strange stuff of the past' which suggests merely an inert

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

residue of forgotten meanings pliable to any 'form' which may be arbitrarily or whimsically impressed upon it from outside. I would say that a work of art (whatever else it may be) is a structure of significances—the unique structure of specifically those significances and no other—and that if it is not so it has no significance and there can be no reason to occupy oneself with it.

Mr. Bayley says, 'It is one thing to *believe* in goblins; it is another thing to *enjoy* goblins. The first is primitive, the second sophisticated'. I doubt if 'enjoying goblins' is necessarily more sophisticated; it may be more superficial, even childish; the 'primitive' who believes in goblins may after all be the one who is responding more completely to life. I doubt if a significant work of art can be made out of 'enjoying goblins', whereas I think such might be made out of believing—really believing—in them with one kind of belief or another. A sophisticated mind may accord the *personæ* of traditional belief the kind of belief that the realized symbol of a deeply-felt truth demands.

We cannot, of course, ever know what the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* would have said he believed in, if asked. But I am sure that such a poem could not have arisen except out of the fundamental beliefs of the author about life. Some of a poet's deepest beliefs may be those traditional beliefs which he in his own sophisticated way shares—not necessarily uncritically—with his people. There is abundance of evidence that those ceremonies and fragments of dramatic ritual to which the contest between the Green Knight and Gawain of our poem obviously relates were by no means a thing of the past in the author's own time, but were on the contrary widespread among the people both high and low by whom they were felt to be essential to their well-being and to the going-on of life. An 'enlightened' Church and State took certain of the last remnants of these rituals seriously enough as late as the 17th century when they did not shrink from the crime of destroying hundreds of village women as 'witches'.

The poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* may, as Mr. Bayley says, be compared with a novelist. But there are novelists and novelists. Mr. Bayley himself refers to Robert Louis Stevenson and Tolstoy. We may leave Long John Silver and his wooden leg with our children and our childhood. But it seems to me that the coherent whole of what Tolstoy thought and felt and believed about life—life very completely responded to and realized—went into *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* and is responsible for their structures. The art of 'telling a story' involves in Tolstoy's case, as in the case of our poet, much more than I think Mr. Bayley allows. Mr. Bayley might look at W. P. Ker's conclusions, in *Epic and Romance*, about the Dutch Gawain romance, *Walewein*. He finds that the author 'has all the mechanical business of romance', and more: 'In *Walewein* there appears quite plainly what is lost in Gaelic and the German stories, the character of the strange land in which the quests are carried out'. Nevertheless Ker finds the romance a failure: 'But if this may be supposed to belong to an

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

older form of the story not evident in the popular versions, a story of adventure in the Land of the Dead, on the other hand the romance has no conception of the meaning of these passages, and gets no poetical result from the chances here offered to it'. Mr. Bayley might ponder the implications of 'meaning' here—'meaning' in its relation to 'poetical result': there is surely a relevant moral.

In conclusion, may I remind Mr. Bayley of what I say towards the close of my article: 'This underlying ritual and the poets' belief in its value as myth is what gives the poem its life. But it is not what has made the poem—not simply a record of a ritual—a complex work of art. A conscious artist, the poet *begins* from a myth; he *ends* with the poem we have'?

JOHN MARSTON'S PLAYS

IN the general enthusiasm for the gorgeous and macabre in Webster's poetry, and in the more sober acknowledgment of the strength and economy of Jonson and Middleton and the occasional vivid complexity of Tourneur, Marston has had less than his due as a writer of dramatic verse. This neglect we may perhaps attribute to an interest in the enigma of the man himself, apparently so neurotic and so prone to dramatize his own weakness, always it seems willing to expose his flank yet always claiming invulnerability. It must be admitted that there is more in him to interest the inferential biographer than in most of his contemporaries and, since his personality is seldom submerged or transcended in his writings, that there is even some excuse for an approach of this kind: he positively invites it. But it is an approach that is from the start bound to be dilettantish, to produce 'findings' that are quite unverifiable, to give us more of the analyst that the analysed, and it would be a matter for regret if the fascination of Marston the man were permanently to overshadow the demonstrable merits of his craftsmanship. The man is too remote for us to appraise him with any accuracy; on the other hand his satires and plays lie readily to hand.

Some of the qualities in Marston's verse are obvious and even a cursory reading should reveal them. He is, for instance, a master of the short and telling phrase and can use this talent variously and with real virtuosity:

> I can see nothing; griefe's invisible,
> And lurkes in secret angles of the heart. (I, 92)[1]
>
> Use men like wedges, one strike out another. (I, 115)
>
> Man will breake out, despight Philosophie. (I, 121)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These are almost random examples and they are far from exhausting the available store. Visual or auditory descriptions have frequently the same felicity or brilliance, and we have one character referring to a cornet that 'jerketh up His straind shrill accents, in the capering ayre' (I, 79) and another remarking of an old man that 'his calves Are sunck into his toes' (II, 174). It has no doubt to be admitted that brief touches such as these, vignette-images as it were, come to a poet with comparative ease and are not as good evidence of his ability as are effects sustained throughout whole passages and scenes. But it does not need searching to see that Marston is equally capable of poetry in longer periods. Antonio's descripton in *Antonio and Mellida* of the storm in which he is supposed to have perished (I, 19) is an example of this kind, the turgid vocabulary ('blurd . . . crudl'd . . . gron'd') giving real life to the picture of the dark and violent sea and the verse admirably suggesting the rise and fall of the straining ship:

> Straight chops a wave, and in his sliftred panch
> Downe fals our ship, and there he breaks his neck:
> Which in an instant up was belkt againe.

Here, after the finality of 'breaks his neck', it is only with an effort that, like the ship, we proceed to the next line. Indeed, what impresses about Marston's verse is not the fact that it is limited to particular effects or contexts but that it is so genuinely varied and flexible. His use of simile, for instance, can range from the colloquially terse, thus:

> Thou art like the Base Violl in a Consort, let the other Instruments wish and delight in your highest sense, thou art still grumbling (III, 16)

or the Chapmanesque formalism of this:

> And as you see a snow ball being rolde
> At first a handfull, yet, long bould about,
> Insensibly acquires a mighty globe,
> So his cold griefe through agitation growes,
> And more he thinkes, the more of griefe he knowes. (II, 62)

to the impressive simplicity of

> Conceipt you me. As having clasp't a rose
> Within my palme, the rose being tane away,
> My hand retaines a little breath of sweete:
> So may man's trunke; his spirit slipt awaie,
> Hold still a faint perfume of his sweet ghest (I, 43).

Again, if we are captiously disposed to think of this last as being itself conceited he can counter with its opposite, equally well done:

---

[1]I refer throughout to the volume and page of H. Harvey Wood's edition.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Where statues and *Joves* acts were vively lim'd
> Boyes with blacke coales draw the vaild parts of nature,
> And leacherous actions of imaginde lust,
> Where tombes and beauteous urns of well dead men
> Stoode in assured rest, the shepheard now
> Unloads his belly: Corruption most abhord
> Mingling it selfe with their renowned ashes. (II, 48)

Even in an age when virtuosity is a poetic norm, when even a Glapthorne can strike out good 'white money' from his exiguous store of bullion, there is, it seems to me, something Protean in Marston's performance. There are few contemporary styles that he has not in some place touched, and not many of these that he has not on some occasion touched into life. He can strike an attitude with the most Senecan of his fellows:

> I tell thee Duke, the blasts
> Of the swolne cheekt winds, nor all the breath of kings
> Can puffe me out my native seat of birth; (I, 89)

can cram a metaphor with the vigour of common life:

> Whop: fut, how he tickles yon trout under the gilles! you shall see him take him by and by, with groping flattery; (I, 24)

and seems equally at home whether he is ending an act with the subdued delicacy of a young and romantic Shakespeare (I, 30) or with a spendid apostrophe to the sun:

> Mount sparkling brightnesse, give the world his day.
> (I, 108)

To say this is not, however, to suggest that Marston was possessed of the facility and copiousness of a Shakespeare or that he was even the sort of poet, on a slighter scale, that Shakespeare was. It is true that there are a number of Shakespearean echoes to be found in his plays, echoes particularly from *Macbeth*—

> Although Neptolis cold, the waves of all the northerne sea,
> Should flow for ever, through these guiltie hands,
> Yet the sanguinolent staine would extant be (III, 69)

—but these are merely occasional and provide no evidence of affinity. Marston is really very much closer to Jonson and, their stormy relations notwithstanding, it is of the tribe of Ben that he must be sealed. This is what has led me to speak of his 'craftsmanship'. One has the impression with him, even more distinctly than with Jonson, that his poetry is something arrived at by real effort, a discipline systematically and persistently pursued; it is not, as it seems to be with Shakespeare, an almost innate and spontaneous capacity for expression so integral to the mind using it that, as Middleton Murry has noted, even the use of metaphor becomes 'a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mode of apprehension' rather than a quality of style.[2] Marston's editor has drawn attention to the seriousness with which, like Jonson, he approached the business of writing for the stage (III, ix-xxi) and it is indeed on this seriousness, and on the application, the conscious acquisition of technique, involved in it, that the initial stress in a critique of Marston should fall. With his own Landulpho he might have spoken of 'our heavenly poesie' as 'That sacred offspring from the braine of Jove' (III, 264) and it is therefore perhaps understandable that, devout as he was, he should have set to work with such ardour to perfect the divine utterance in his plays. Yet it is not only with the ampler and more transcendental elements of poetry that he concerns himself. To quote Dr. Wood: 'The elegant, languid "Good-boye" of the affected gallant; the "Um" and "ha" of the sententious courtier; stutterings and malapropisms, the slang of the streets, play-scraps, proverbial tags—he notes and uses them all' (III, xxi). Like the earnest enquirer in *The Fawne* who 'has vowde to get the consumption of the lunges, or to leve to posteritie the true orthography and pronunciation of laughing' (II, 196-7) he seems determined to indicate and differentiate between various shades of exclamation. The results ('Hah', 'Whoop', 'su su su', etc.) have little to do with poetry in the 'heavenly' sense yet in their own way they reflect a self-conscious experimentation that elsewhere takes on a more substantial form. Consider, for instance, this passage in *Antonio and Mellida* (I, 17-8):

> Come downe, she comes like: O, no Simile
> Is pretious, choyce, or elegant enough
> To illustrate her descent: leape heart, she comes,
> She comes: smile heaven, and softest Southern winde
> Kisse her cheeke gently with perfumed breath.
> She comes: Creations puritie, admir'd,
> Ador'd, amazing raritie, she comes.

The rhetorical anaphora is far too concentrated to seem anything but crude, but we can see at least that the dramatist has taken some trouble with it. He essays a Jonsonian mastery of the figure and it is just because it misses fire that the passage so clearly evidences his attempt. Again, that 'O, no Simile' can be set against other passages—

> and thou and I will live:
> (Lets thinke like what) and thou and I will live
> Like unmatcht mirrors of calamitie (I, 29)

and

> Lust thou art hie,
> My similes may well come from the Skye (III, 25)

—to show how Marston's use of these devices is sometimes self-conscious to the point of embarrassment. No apparent purpose is served by giving the characters this preternatural awareness of their

[2] *The Problem of Style*, p. 13.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

own imagery and it seems reasonable to conclude that they are simply speaking for Marston, who is so preoccupied with the question *how* they should speak as temporarily to have forgotten *what*. It is only when the self-consciousness is given to a gull, and embodied in the form of sententious parenthesis—

> (A figure cal'd in art *Gradatio*.
> With some learned *Climax*) (II, 187)

—that it seems to justify itself in the character's mouth. Like the anaphora in the previous passage it is, however, even when least successful, one more sign of the dramatist's pre-occupation with technique. There are others. Marston satirized Munday under the name Post-hast in *Histrio-Mastix*, and had him reply 'O stately Scrivener' to another character who spoke not of a 'name' but a 'nomenclature' (III, 251). Later he caused another character, Gulch, to comment on Post-hast's own composition in these terms:

> Well fellowes, I never heard happier stuffe,
> Heer's no new luxurie or blandishment,
> But plenty of old Englands mothers words. (III, 260).

These sallies, it seems to me, indicate as well as anything his own position in the matter of diction. When we learn to see him as one deliberately aspiring to transcend the homespun commended by Gulch, content even if the outcome prove caviare to the general, and yet as one who is also aware that polysyllables can impose their own particular form of snobbery, as with Post-hast, then perhaps we begin to see him with the minimum of distortion. Evidently at this time it was thought better to be a Post-hast than a Gulch, and certainly Marston sometimes proffers extraordinary coinages; but his practice in this matter was not so exceptional as it has been painted. In 1594 another satirist, Nashe, had defended 'compound wordes' at some length:

> 'For the compounding of my wordes, therein I imitate rich men who, hauing gathered store of white single money together, conuert a number of those small little scutes into great peeces of gold, such as double Pistols and Portugues. Our English tongue of all languages most swarmeth with the single money of mona-sillables, which are the onely scandall of it. Bookes written in them and no other seeme like Shop-keepers boxes, that containe nothing else saue half-pence, three-farthings, and two-pences . . .' etc.[3]

Doubtless Marston would have taken up a similar position had he been challenged. But in any case as Dr. Wood has pointed out his outlandish coinages have been exaggerated: when we are most conscious of them it is usually because we are thinking in terms of *Poetaster* rather than in terms of his own works. Even where they

[3] *Works*, ed. McKerrow, II, 184.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are most ludicrous it is easy to excuse them or to see them as reflecting the effort of a genuinely original, if in many ways idiosyncratic, mind to forge a personal medium that shall be characteristic of its modes of thought, and so to find its proper, personal voice. Effort of this kind is rare enough among poets to excuse even bathos. It is simply the zest for experiment that explains these oddities, just as it is this zest that explains why, having lit on a phrase that satisfied him, Marston was sometimes prepared to construct an immodest number of variations upon it. *Antonio's Revenge* gives the palmary instance of this where, having written

> For see, the dapple gray coursers of the morne
> Beat up the light with their bright silver hooves,
> And chase it through the skye, (I, 74)

Marston almost at once presents us with this:

> Darknesse is fled: looke, infant morne hath drawne
> Bright silver curtains, 'bout the couch of night:
> And now *Auroras* horse trots azure rings,
> Breathing faire light about the firmament; (I, 76)

and goes on to clinch the series with a nocturnal version, thus:

> The black jades of swart night trot foggy rings
> Bout heavens browe. (I, 98)

Again, there is a similar passage at the beginning of *What You Will* (II, 237). Reiteration of one's own imagery like this we may well be tempted to call self-parody but on the other hand it is obviously unfair to abstract the passages and set them side by side like this, since they then appear to be much more closely related than a normal reading or hearing would ever disclose. Notice too that 'variation' is a word that can hardly be used pejoratively here: the images have as it were a common root but no one of them is simply a rehash of another. Even if this sort of experiment has its dangers, that is, one cannot declare that it has quite miscarried.

These observations may seem somewhat desultory and perhaps it is time that we asked the general question, in what does Marston's peculiar strength as a poet seem to consist? The answer is surely that it lies in his having been a satirist, in having received his poetic initiation and training in the writing of satiric verse. Satire at this time was in some respects (certainly not in all) a very much healthier form of writing than its rival modes, and this chiefly because it was not exclusive, disjunct from experience, in the way that they were. Thus if we set the convention represented best in the work of Lyly, Peele, Marlowe, the early Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher against the satiric convention as it appears in the plays of the later Shakespeare, Marston, Jonson, Tourneur and Middleton we can see that it is the distinctive virtue of the second group that they are prepared to include within the scope of their verse experiences which, to the poets of the first group, would often have seemed 'unpoetical' or taboo. Lyly and Peele and their fellows were writing

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the convention of 'sweet' or 'mellisonant' poetry and it was of the essence of this style's effectiveness that certain sides of life, the more mundane or sordid, should be either wholly omitted or at least slurred over. Their pastoralism, as they themselves would have been pleased to acknowledge, was light and thin, a sort of poetic gossamer; to have exposed it to the heat of common life would have shrivelled it instantly. The satirical writers, on the other hand, and perhaps Jonson and Marston particularly, had from the very outset been trained to keep their feet on the ground and to use their eyes, and their interest was pre-eminently in the unvarnished, the odd and even the unpleasant sides of life. It was the everyday world that was their oyster and they were quite prepared to point out that there was fishy mess as well as pearls inside it. Two such different attitudes could hardly proceed without jarring; if we see the jar reflected mainly in the writings of the satirists that is probably simply because their convention allowed them to discuss it while the adherents of the other convention, at least in their poetry, could not. The jar, moreover, is not to be thought of only as showing itself in the field of Drama: indeed it is in the field of formal Satire that it first appears. Guilpin in his *Skialetheia* had written of 'whimpring Sonnets' and 'puling Elegies' (B8v), and had suggested that 'stricktest' Plato, in banishing poets from his commonwealth, would have preferred satires 'Before the whyning loue-song' (C2), and in this he had done little more than restate the charges made by Hall in *Virgidemiarum*[4] the year before. We find similar statements in *The Scourge of Villanie*[5]. This reaction on the part of the formal satirists against 'sugred' sonnets and lyrics, though anterior to it, was really parallel with the reaction of the dramatists against the earlier convention of Lyly, Peele and Marlowe, against their prettiness or mere magniloquence, and of course we occasionally find the same man, like Marston, engaged on both fronts. To call the whole process the revolt of the Jacobeans against the Elizabethans would no doubt be to generalize too sweepingly; at the same time, it is a tempting formulation. Again, it seems to me that it is this contentious background to their work that leads the satirical or quasi-satirical dramatists to be so interested in technique: their repudiation of the earlier style necessarily involves an interest in style itself, and they have to find a new way of writing to replace the old.

Marston's attitude to 'sweet' poetry, clear in his satires, is no less clear in his plays. He speaks of 'lustfull sonnets' as 'the shame of Poesie' (II, 180) and of 'mouldy fopperies of stale Poetry, Unpossible drie mustie Fictions' (III, 179), and he is always ready to parody the convention—either generally, as in

> . . . tis just three monthes: shall I speake like a Poet?
> *Thrice hath the horned mone* . . . (II, 262)

---

[4]See *Virgidemiarum*, I, i, ii, vii, etc.

[5]See sigs. E1, E4v, E5, F6v, etc., of the second, and complete edition.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or through a particular dramatist, as when he incorporates a line of Marlowe into his own characteristic idiom (III, 203) and allows one of his characters to cock an eyebrow at it. Sometimes his impatience with 'sweetness' and courtliness finds direct expression through his characters, like Rossaline in *Antonio and Mellida*:

> *Alb.* O no, thart too constant to afflict my heart,
> Too too firme fixed in unmooved scorne.
> *Ross.* Pish, pish; I fixed in unmooved scorne?
> Why, Ile love thee to night.
> *Alb.* But whome to morrow?
> *Ross.* Faith, as the toy puts me in the head. (I, 27)

More usually the characters are themselves ridiculed for their affectation, as when in *Jack Drum's Entertainment* Brabant Senior is allowed to give rhetorical 'complement' its head:

> 'I protest your abilities are infinite, your perfections matchlesse, your matchlesse perfection infinite in abilitie, and your infinite abilitie, matchlesse in perfection.' (III, 209)

Similar thrusts at the more 'poetical' sorts of poetry can be found in most of Marston's plays—one of the most concise occurs in *What You Will* (II, 238), 'He speakes like a player, hah! poeticall'—but for our purposes it is more important to consider the positive implications that these have and to see what sort of verse, if not the 'sweet' sort, Marston himself normally writes. Knowing his propensity for self-confutation one would not be very surprised to find that he habitually out-Lylyed Lyly. In this instance, however, nothing of this sort can be maintained. Even in the verse he gives his young lovers (where, if anywhere, we should expect to find the repudiated convention asserting itself) Marston is far more inclusive than his predecessors, and at the same time no mere parodist of their effects:

> Astonishment of Nature, be not proud
> Of *Fortunes* bounties: *Brabant* is a man,
> Tho not so clogd with durt as others are:
> I do confess my yonger brothership;
> Yet therein laie no such disparagement
> As your high scorne imputes unto my worth.
> Coach Jades and Dogges, are coupled still together,
> Only for outward likeness, growth and strength,
> But the bright models of eternitie,
> Are joind together for affection,
> Which in the soule is form'de. Oh let this move,
> *Love should make marriage, and not marriage Love.*
> (III, 212)

Peele and his fellows would not, I think, have imported that telling phrase 'clogd with durt' into a context of this kind nor would they, even for the sake of the explicit contrast, have risked likening two

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lovers to harnessed beasts—especially where these are not 'coursers', but 'jades' and 'dogs'. The passage necessarily has something of that heightened tone that we associate with Elizabethan love-poetry, but it clearly has other qualities too: ratiocinative coherence, succinctness, the capacity to touch on 'unpretty' subjects, and a certain precision of vocabulary such that 'soul' really means 'soul' and not simply 'essence' or 'personality'.

Lest I should be thought to be claiming that it is a superlative example of Marston's writing I had better add that this passage has been cited, not because it is in any way distinguished, but because it is a quite ordinary example of the sort of love poetry that we find in the plays. My point is that even here, where he can hardly be represented as writing on the full stretch, Marston's verse does present, if only weakly, certain characteristic virtues which we should not normally associate with the exponents of 'sweet' poetry. As I have suggested, these virtues are not confined merely to his own work: they appear also in the plays of his associates. In so many of the finer pieces of Jacobean dramatic verse we can see that the quality of the writing is intimately connected with, and almost a function of, the capacity to include and digest 'unpoetical' elements. Middleton's celebrated passages in *The Changeling*, which Mr. T. S. Eliot singled out as exemplifying his mastery of versification—

> I that am of your blood was taken from you
> For your better health; look no more upon't,
> But cast it to the ground regardlessly,
> Let the common sewer take it from distinction, etc.

—shows this capacity very well, 'the common sewer' being the sort of image a romantic poet would deliberately avoid and yet being, here, almost the hall-mark vouching for the poet's mastery. If we substitute for it some such phrase as 'the tide of living', where there is none of this sense of strangeness and none of the vivid prosaism, the tension of the writing drops at once. Again, when Jonson writes (*Volpone*, I, i, 41-3):

> You shall ha' some will swallow
> A melting heire, as glibly, as your *Dutch*
> Will pills of butter, and ne're purge for't

he is using the material of common experience in a similar way. Marston offers us poetry of the same sort, poetry which one is aware of not so much as 'fine' writing but as writing that has a sublunary vitality and strength. Consider Velure's remark in *Histrio-Mastix*:

> Our Shops (sometimes) were stuft with cloath of gold,
> But *Warre* hath emptied them, and Spyders build
> Their Cob-web-tents; weaving foule dusty lawne
> For poore woe-working *Poverty* to wear (III, 297).

Not only does this have the authentic force of the mundane, but the introduction of the idea of lawn into the context of shabbiness sets

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up a degree of stress within the writing that helps to give it life. We see something of the same sort in a passage from *Antonio's Revenge* where the sun's rising is described in terms of a courtezan leaving her bed:

> The neat gay mistres of the light's not up,
> Her cheekes not yet slurd over with the paint
> Of borrowed crimsone; the unpranked world
> Wears yet the night-cloathes . . . (I, 100).

Put this beside the 'Mount sparkling brightnesse' quoted earlier and we are again reminded of Marston's versatility. Indeed, it seems possible to affirm that he is really at his best when he is writing in this way, with the directness and astringency—and, I may add, the richness—that the practice of Satire has shown him to be possible. It is his satiric background that makes, for example, his use of Seneca so much more vigorous than that of a straight translator like Jasper Heywood,[6] and it is the same background that gives so much liveliness to his dialogue. In what does that liveliness consist? Surely it is simply the capacity for working in terms of life rather than in terms of a restrictive convention, a capacity reflected in his giving some of his most spirited speeches to women (see Mellida's first speech on I, 26, for instance) and in allowing them at times to speak most unseraphically.

> '. . . I will marry a fellow that keepes a fox in his bosom, a goat under his arme holes, and a polecat in his mouth, rather then re-accept thee.' (II, 214).

Lines like these do not constitute great poetry but, like the usurer's love-song in *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (III, 197), they are refreshingly different from the stylised vapidities of the previous age.

* * * *

If in the foregoing paragraphs I seem at times to have been making rather large claims for Marston's ability as a poet that has not been because I am insensitive to his many lapses nor because I wish to place them discreetly in the shadows. His clumsier efforts are so notorious that it has seemed only fair to him, by way of general introduction, to draw attention to the virtues (too often neglected) that his writing often shows. To leave off on what might seem to be a note of unqualified commendation would be uncritical, however, and I am constrained to balance the picture by giving some examples of just how bad, at its worst, his verse can be. Malheureux remarks in *The Dutch Courtezan* that 'Rich sense makes good bad language' (II, 134). It seems from his practice that Marston would have been only too willing to agree with this, but at times the truth of the dictum is strained intolerably.

Marston's two chief weaknesses, so far as his verse is concerned, lie in his tendency on the one hand to write inflated bombast,

[6] I hope shortly to publish a note on this point.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wordy and windy, and on the other to write gnomic brachylogies as obscure as those of Greville. That he should continually be falling into two such *opposite* faults seems to me to be significant. It is as though we found in Jonson, not only the touches of pedantry that he sometimes shows, but a simultaneous flippancy about learning. As so often in Marston's work the phenomenon is so peculiar that one is almost at a loss to account for it.

The tendency to compress the meaning of a passage out of existence is easily exemplified and hardly needs to be discussed. Two extracts will show the form it takes:

> Slow comfort to huge cares, is swiftest sin . . .(I, 82)

> *Gods naught foresee, but see, for to their eyes*
> *Naught is to come, or past,* Nor are you vile
> Because the Gods foresee: *for Gods and We*
> *See as thinges are; things are not for we see* . . . (II, 23)

The tendency to fustian, on the other hand, though sometimes to be seen in single phrases and short passages—

> O eternallie much loved . . . (II, 130)

> I have a thing sits here; it is not griefe,
> Tis not despaire, nor the most plague
> That the most wretched are infected with:
> But the most greefull, despairing, wretched,
> Accursed, miserable. O, for heavens sake
> Forsake me now . . . (I, 90-1)

—is usually more pervasive when it appears, and less easily seized upon. Antonio's speech before the song at I, 47 could nevertheless be instanced as showing the sort of rant which, at his worst, Marston was capable of producing, and most of Massinissa's speeches in *Sophonisba* are similarly disposed to out-herod Herod. These faults put together, the gnomic and the inflated, must necessarily remind us that, if Marston has his merits as a poet, he has very serious defects too.

It is not only in his poetry that there is unevenness, however; a like vacillation appears in his handling of the action, the drama itself. That this is sometimes very competent cannot be denied, and where there is the possibility of comparison with the work of other dramatists this will frequently be judged to redound to Marston's advantage. Set his *Induction* of *Antonio and Mellida* against that written by Webster for *The Malcontent* and one has an immediate impression of his dramatic sense. Webster's effort is well-known (probably because it provides some evidence of the rivalry between the theatrical companies) yet it is transparently less useful than Marston's, where the actors are made to discuss the parts which they are to play, thus providing the audience with a preliminary commentary, as if from a fresh dimension, on the characters. The trick is simple enough, but not to be despised merely on that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

account. Again, if we compare Aurelia's speeches in scenes (ii) and (iii) of Act IV of *The Malcontent* ('We will daunce, musicke, we will daunce' etc.) with the precisely similar device in Ford's *The Broken Heart* (V, ii) we can see that, bad as both versions are, Marston's is less bad than Ford's. But Marston's qualities as a dramatist are not to be expressed merely in terms of his excelling the weaker effects in others: they are more positive than this. He is genuinely sensitive to his medium and gives us more than occasional evidence of his ability to handle it. The many and varied music cues are of this kind (they are very seldom irrelevant) and a situation in the first act of *The Insatiate Countess* provides us with a further example. Here Thais and Abigail have to concoct the surprises of the plot between them while they are actually on the stage, and yet the audience, if these are to remain 'surprises', must not know what they are. How can this best be done? Marston does it by shifting our attention to the other couple on the stage, Mendoza and the Lady Lentulus, and by making them speak of seduction—doubtless one of the few topics interesting enough *per se* to distract us from the intriguing whispers of the wives. It is again a simple trick, but an effective one. Consider, further, a passage from the second act of *Sophonisba*. Massinissa has entered 'in his gorget and shert . . . his arme transfixt with a dart' and at this point he is being dressed by the traitorous Gisco. He reads a letter, brought by one Gelosso, informing him of Gisco's treachery.

> . . . Massinissa reading, starts and speakes to *Gisco*.
> *Ma.* Forbeare, how art thou cald?
> *Gi.* *Gisco*, my Lord.
> *Ma.* Um, *Gisco*, ha, touch not mine arme, most onely man. (To *Gelosso*)
> Sirrha, sirrah, art poore?
> *Gi.* Not poore.
> *Ma.* Nephew command. (*Massinissa* begins to drawe).
> Our troupes of horse make indisgracde retraite,
> Trot easie off: not poore: *Jugurth* give charge,
> My souldiers stand in square battalia, (Exit *Jugurth*).
> Intirely of themselves: *Gisco* th'art old,
> Tis time to leave off murder . . . etc. (II, 25-6)

Dr. Wood tells us that he is not happy in giving 'drawe' for 'drane' in the third stage direction, but there seems no reason why he should not be. This is, in fact, one of those extremely satisfying moments when a character's speech suddenly comes fully alive, illuminating his actions, and the emendation helps to show us how nimbly Marston has conceived the incident. Gisco having given his name, Gelosso makes as if to grasp Massinissa's arm. We can imagine him nodding, wishing to signify that this is indeed the traitor. Massinissa flinches, fearing lest the dart in his flesh should be disturbed. Then he proceeds to question Gisco, interspersing his questions with orders to those about him, and at the same time drawing *the dart* from his arm.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It seems to me that as a fully realised dramatic incident, suggesting the hero's stoical courage, this passage could hardly be improved upon. Shakespeare himself did little better when he gave us Macbeth donning his armour on the battlements of Dunsinane, talking to Seyton and speaking his thoughts aloud. On the other hand one has perhaps to admit that Marston may have had the very recent example of *Macbeth* in mind, and that without this model to guide him he might have botched the business completely. All these examples of his ability in the matter of stage-craft have, in fact, like those of his poetic ability, their obverse; and indeed in this case it is the obverse, the ineptitudes, that are more prominent. I do not propose to deal at any length with Marston's dramatic blunders—there are too many of them—but even a sketchy summary should give some idea of their gravity. Some, indeed, leap out at the reader—the anticlimatic endings of *Antonio and Mellida* and *The Insatiate Countess*, the fact that the heroine of the latter play is not 'insatiate' but simply fickle, the naïvety of the dumb-show before Act V of *Antonio's Revenge*, Maria's cry in the same play on hearing of her husband's death ('O me most miserable'—this is comparable only with the appalling 'Oh, by whom?' of *Macbeth*, II, iii, 105), and those two fantastic stage-directions in *The Insatiate Countess*:

> The second change. *Isabella* fals in love with *Massino* when the changers speak. (III, 22)

and

> *Tell him all the Plot.* (III, 66)

If we add to these such unactable pieces of dialogue as the ravings of Piero in *Antonio and Mellida* (I, 39 and I, 42) or the auditory incomprehensibility of the line 'O save thine owne (yet) fame' in *Sophonisba* (II, 33)—where the locutor is virtually required to speak the brackets—we shall have some idea of the confusion and preposterousness that the plays reveal. There is far too much of it for us to be able to ignore it. Why—unless because Marston learned the language from his mother, born Maria Guarsi, and wished to flaunt his knowledge of it—should one of the chief passages in *Antonio and Mellida*, a recognition scene (I, 48), be in Italian? Why, at the end of the same play, should Antonio's rival, Galeatzo, who has been ardent, suddenly aver of himself that 'He that was nere hot, will soone be cold' (I, 61)? Questions like these are continually presenting themselves and in view of them it is hardly possible to pretend that Marston is anything but a very uneven dramatist. One cannot condone such weaknesses.

* * * *

The reader may be disposed to feel, after this brief discussion, that the outcome is inconclusive and that it therefore hardly justifies such details as I have given: the only conclusion to be drawn is that Marston sometimes writes well and sometimes badly. Let me say that I agree that this is indeed the only possible conclusion when we are approaching him in this way, through his verse or through the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dramatic element in his plays, but let me add, too, that it has not been simply for the sake of an equivocal summing-up that I have ventured upon an examination of this kind. The discussion up to this point will have served my purpose, first, if it has shown some of the more important effects, good and bad, in Marston's work and, secondly, if it has suggested, through its very appearance of pointlessness, that he is a writer whom it is not always easy to appraise. It should be clear by now that we could go on balancing felicities against failures for a very long time but that, though it might expose further sides to the plays, the process would not help us to give a clear and unambiguous judgment on Marston's work as a whole. We have in fact been using, though deliberately, a very limited and ultimately sterile sort of criticism.

How, then, are we to proceed? Is there any approach by which we can arrive at a convincing evaluation of these dramas, a decision one way or the other? It seeems to me that there is. As with his satires we need to turn our attention to the overall coherence and organization (or the lack of it) that Marston's various plays present, and consider to what extent they are successful as *wholes*. A judgment formed along these lines almost at once presents itself and the critic's only difficulty, it seems to me, is to prevent its being delivered too summarily, in terms too vague and general. The point is after all a crucial one for Marston; let us then proceed deliberately and with a due regard for the kinds of evidence that the plays provide.

The question where such an inquiry should begin is easily answered. We must begin with the Satire that is scattered everywhere. Indeed so prevalent is this element, and so characteristic of Marston's plays, that I believe no examination of his Drama, if it is to be at all useful, can afford to neglect it. It is by his treatment of this satirical matter that a critic's work will stand or fall. That there is much of it goes almost without saying: in the earlier plays, particularly, there is even more than in the plays of Tourneur. It is varied too. The old satiric themes of the Middle Ages frequently appear, and we have quite lengthy discussions of the vanities of this world (*e.g.* III, 185), of Merchants, Lawyers and 'Citty-Dames' (*Histrio-Mastix, passim*), of cosmetics (I, 75), of the baseness of Man (I, 101-2), of Women (I, 157), and of the general unholiness of the earth (I, 197). Parallel with these we have a number of passages which recall, not so much the general ethos of mediæval Satire, but rather particular satirists, and these not of the mediæval kind—writers like Martial, Guilpin, or even Marston himself. Again, mixed in with all these there are yet other passages where—as when he attacks the unsophisticated and clumsy moralizing of the Morality plays (III, 265), or when he anticipates the experiments of later Theoprastians like Hall and Webster and Earle, and writes a formal 'character' (II, 76; II, 271; III, 186)—Marston seems to be following his own bent and venturing into less well-trodden paths. What strikes one in reading, however, is not so much the variety of these satirisms, nor the jumble of traditional with more original kinds, but simply their ubiquity. *Jack Drum's Entertainment, Histrio-*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mastix, What You Will, The Dutch Courtezan, The Malcontent, The Fawn—in these plays there is quite literally hardly a page that does not contain a passage of Satire, or at least a snatch, and there is everywhere the same inveterate tendency to break out into satirical and quasi-satirical palaver. *Jack Drum* is perhaps the cardinal example, for there the satiric bent is so pronounced that Satire intrudes even into unlikely places. Ellis can hardly speak without falling into irrelevantly satiric similes (III, 211 and 237) and Jack Drum is sometimes in the same case (206), while Pasquil speaks Satire no matter whether he happens to be raving (225 and 235) or making love:

> I did but softly sip
> The Roseall Juice of your reviving breath:
> Let clumsie judgements, chilblained gowtie wits
> Bung up their chiefe content within the whoopes
> Of a stuft dry Fatt: and repose their hopes
> Of happinesse, and hearts tranquilitie,
> Upon increase of durt: but let me live
> Clipt in the cincture of a faithfull arme,
> Luld in contented joy, being made divine,
> With the most precious love of *Katherine*. (199)

In a different context one might easily skate over the central section of this extract but in the play, surrounded as it is on all sides by similar satiric touches, it can hardly fail to assert itself. The fact that an 'aside' of this kind should be dwelt on for four or five lines also tends to focus attention on it. We get a glimpse of a curmudgeon cramming a barrel ('Fatt') with his hoard and our interest tends to linger there instead of moving on to the real focus, the 'most precious love of Katherine'. This almost gratuitous introduction of satiric points is, as I have observed, evidence of the extreme density of Satire and satirisms in *Jack Drum*, but in some of the other plays the position is not much different. In *What You Will*, to take another case, the different characters are so prone to speak in satirical terms that characterization in any normal sense almost disappears, and it is difficult to determine with which (if any) of the characters Marston is to be presumed to sympathize. Even in the last play, *The Insatiate Countess*, there are still traces of a general satiric underlay (*e.g.* III, 21 and 41). Indeed so strong is this element that had Marston and Chapman collaborated not with Jonson but with a dramatist like Drayton or Heywood in the writings of *Eastward Ho* one dare affirm that Marston's contribution would have been easy to pick out: one could simply have looked for the Satire, and given those parts to him. But in this instance what we have lost in the way of precise attribution has been restored to us in merit: the play would hardly have turned out so well but for Jonson's controlling hand.

It should be fairly obvious that the dramatic form can be used to invest Satire with a rather special objectivity, so that the reader does not normally approach the satiric matter as if it proceeded

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

directly from the author's pen, and it is easy enough to show that this is a process that operates even in these rather egocentric plays. For example the cowardice of players is satirized in *Histrio-Mastix*, and Gut is made to say

> Alasse sir, we Players are priviledg'd,
> Tis our Audience must fight in the field for us,
> And we upon the stage for them, (III, 286)

but this does not incline us, unless we are perverse, to inquire into or mock at Marston's own personal valour, or the lack of it. In cases like this, that is, Marston seems to have been able to by-pass some of the difficulties which he encountered in his formal satires and did not solve. This is true of particular or isolated passages but difficulties arise where the dramatist is using Satire, not merely incidentally or occasionally, but as an almost continuous medium for his dialogue; and this is really what Marston is doing. Where the Satire is all-pervasive in this way and where, particularly, it consists not infrequently of the moral variety, such as we find everywhere in the writings of the Middle Ages, the dramatist is not as a matter of fact completely free from commitments; for this use of Satire, and again of Satire of this kind, obliges him to preserve a certain degree of moral responsibility. At its lowest, this is simply a matter of the stabilizing of his effects. If through his characters' dialogue he strikes at certain sorts of immorality then it is incumbent upon him, in his position of dramatist, also to show some aversion from those sorts of immorality, and a corresponding respect for their opposites; if he does not we receive only a blurred impression of the attitude sought to be embodied in the play, an impression of confusion and ambiguity. *Eastward Ho* is in this sense a good play: there is a general undertone of Satire throughout its dialogue, directed chiefly against such failings as filial ingratitude, pride, snobbery and indolence, and this undertone is fittingly confirmed by the dénouement in which we have virtue appropriately rewarded and vice punished. The morality suggested by the plot may appear naïve, and we may of course argue that in life virtue frequently seems to be punished and vice rewarded; but this is beside the point. We have to concede that there is little in the play—whether in the Satire, the plot, or the dramatists' indirect comments—to militate very strongly against, or set up an unfortunate tension with, anything else. There is, in fact, both consistency and coherence. We accept the play on its own terms, and the satiric content on the same terms.

Eastward Ho is, however, something of a special case: not merely because it is a collaboration but because it shows little resemblance to the known works of its authors. Certainly it is little enough like Marston's other work. In the remainder of his plays it is far more difficult to accept what is being offered and this, I think, simply because it is so difficult to make out on what terms the offer has been made. It is not easy to explain the reader's reaction in these cases without seeming to exaggerate it into mere perversity, but perhaps a specific passage will help to suggest what I am getting at.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I take a characteristic example from *Antonio's Revenge*. Antonio is speaking of Man.

> The curse of heaven raines
> In plagues unlimited through all his daies.
> His mature age growes onely mature vice,
> And ripens onely to corrupt and rot
> The budding hopes of infant modestie.
> Still striving to be more then man, he prooves
> More then a divell, divelish suspect, divelish crueltie:
> All hell-straid juyce is powred to his vaines,
> Making him drunke with fuming surquedries,
> Contempt of heaven, untam'd arrogance,
> Lust, state, pride, murder. (I, 101-2)

If I say that a passage like this commits the writer in certain ways I do not mean that there is any compulsion upon him to write about Man only in these or similar terms. The passage has a local aptness at the juncture of the action at which it occurs and it would be quite wrong to feel that Marston's commitment is to the single attitude here expressed. At the same time, because Antonio is obviously intended to have our sympathy when he is speaking like this, and because this is only one of innumerable similar passages scattered throughout this and other plays, we do feel that the dramatist is obliged at least not to contradict the attitude expressed, or wantonly to upset it. Since we are made to feel that such ruminations are the implied comments of the mind conceiving the play we naturally take them over at (as we might say) valuation. We accept them as rough indications of the foundations upon which the play is built, and we feel that the dramatist is committed, by his practice, to respecting them as such, as foundations of that kind. After all it is the dramatist who has raised the general question of morality by incorporating these quasi-satiric scraps; he cannot accuse his readers if they then take the matter up. In Marston's case the moral implications of the Satire are, moreover, strengthened by his numerous references to religion. There are references to religious matters in every one of the plays, except perhaps *Sophonisba*,[7] and of course these make the general pretension to moralizing even more striking. We find a noteworthy instance again in *Antonio's Revenge* when the revengers, though pardoned for their execution of Piero, retire to a cloistral refuge to expiate their violence:

> We know the world, and did we know no more,
> Wee would not live to know: but since constraint
> Of holy bands forceth us keepe this lodge
> Of durts corruption, till dread power cals
> Our soules appearance, we will live inclos'd
> In holy verge of some religious order,
> Most constant votaries. (I, 132)

[7]See I, 14, 46, 77-8, 173, 183, 192, 196, 197; II, 93, 101, 156, 169; III, 35, 59, 74, 235, 236, 285, 288, 301—the list is not exhaustive.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

References and allusions of this sort only serve to make it more obligatory than ever that the dramatist should be free from moral impeachment. Question the morality informing the plays and their whole structure begins to shake.

Marston seems himself to have been dimly aware of the commitments that his use of Satire involved, and to have realized that 'a home thrusting tongue', if it was really to thrust home, should be governed and restrained from loose or salacious speech. 'Freenes', says Hercules in *The Fawne*, 'so't grow not to licentiousnes Is gratefull to just states' (II, 158). He seems, in fact, to have realized that much of the basis of his Satire was still morality, and to have agreed with what Webster, in his *Induction* to *The Malcontent*, had given to 'Burbidge' to say:

> 'Why should not we injoy the antient freedome of poesie? Shall we protest to the Ladies that their painting makes them Angells, or to my yong gallant, that his expence in the brothell shall gaine him reputation? No, sir, such vices as stand not accountable to law, should be cured as men heale tetters, by casting inke upon them.' (I, 142-3)

On the other hand, however, he makes Lampatho in *What You Will* mock at 'the straine that chokes the theaters . . . Forsooth to raile' (II, 266), and elsewhere in the same play allows Quadratus, with whom we are obviously meant to agree, to use his own satiric pseudonym of 'Don Kynsayder' as a term of abuse (248-9). Again, in the same play, which is everywhere satiric, he gives Quadratus a tirade (250) which is something of a *locus classicus* as an *attack* on Satire. This is sheer moral incoherence. How a reader is expected to accept the play without noticing these internal jars and dissonances I am at a loss to say. Yet it is the sort of muddle that we find everywhere.

Where we have internal dissonance or incongruity at its very plainest, however, and where we are best able to put a finger on the unsatisfactoriness of Marston's attitude, is in his prurience. If I say that Marston's proclivity for making bawdy jokes is what really upsets his plays I hope I shall not have imputed to me a puritanical or spinsterish intolerance. Every reader of early plays must notice the very high percentage of salacious sallies and *double entendre* that they contain and this observation will soon persuade him that any critic who brings to the plays the attitude of a Bowdler is at once disqualified from appraising them. Set beside the robustness of so much early writing our modern standards of 'politeness' often look uncomfortably like hypocrisy or neurotic dissociation; to apply them to books like *Gargantua* or *The Miller's Tale* or Jonson's *Famous Voyage* is to expose, not the books, but the standards themselves. In objecting to Marston's bawdiness I am not, then, concerned to exclaim with a sort of pious horror against the simple fact that it exists, for this would be simply to acknowledge a mote in my own eye. I wish instead to point out how grossly out of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

keeping this strain is with the underlying pretensions to moral judication and with the duties to which, as a satirist, the dramatist has committed himself. Where a jar occurs it is not, that is, between a modern and an Elizabethan ethic, but between the pretensions and practice of the dramatist himself. As in Marston's formal satires it is within the work itself that one finds the reason why it should be otherwise, and not so.

Notice that in the passage quoted a little earlier from *Antonio's Revenge* Antonio is made to speak of Lust as one of the plagues of heaven. With this normal Christian attitude Marston quite obviously agrees: to him the Seven Deadly Sins are deadly indeed, and Lust among the worst. Albano in *What You Will* is made to point out that 'femalls lust' is as trustworthy as a usurer or the Devil (II, 263); in *The Dutch Courtezan* Malheureux and Freevill almost open the play with their discussion of how 'This lust is a most deadly sinne' (II, 73) and of course the whole treatment of Francischina, and the attitude to prostitution (*e.g.* 127), underlies what they say. Herod in *The Fawne* deplores the fact that Nature has given 'so insatiate parts of appetite to so weake a governes as woman' (II, 194); Malevole in *The Malcontent* cries out against adultery, 'the most horride transgression under the cope of salvation' after simony (I, 150); and in *Sophonisba*, when Sophonisba is being attacked by Syphax, and threatens to kill herself in order to escape him, Marston stresses Syphax's vileness by giving him these lines:

> Doe strike thy breast, know being dead, Ile use,
> With highest lust of sense thy senselesse flesh,
> And even then thy vexed soule shall see,
> Without resistance, thy trunke prostitute,
> Unto our appetite. (II, 45)

Reinforcing the effect of references like these we have many satirical attacks on lustful creatures, like the lecherous old usurer in *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (III, 197) and the city dames in *Histrio-Mastix* who go about with their breasts bared (III, 273). A reader can hardly help relating all this with Marston's many respectful allusions to religion, with his implicit claims (expressed often enough through his characters) to being 'the scourge of light inconstancie' (III, 229), and with the predominantly moral structure of most of his plots, and it is natural that he should end at least by expecting only the bad characters to speak bawdily. Even in their mouths, he is likely to feel, prurience would have to be carefully handled, so as to avoid the suspicion that it is being dwelt on from pure enjoyment. That is, the reader expects—and is entitled to expect—that Lust will be *consistently* regarded as a Deadly Sin.

These expectations are travestied and flouted in what Marston actually gives us. No doubt we should be on our guard, remembering the obvious relish of *The Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image* and the double-talk with which Marston sought to extenuate his performance in that poem; but I think there is on the contrary

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(and this is the dramatist's own doing) a continual tendency to take the Satire and the moral protestations seriously, so that one is never really prepared for the dirt when it comes. I am not here referring to what might be called the simple common-places of Elizabethan bawdy writing, for these are conventional enough hardly to attract attention. The puns on musical terms—'I will sing, so you will beare my burthen' (III, 211) or 'Well said wench, and the Pricke-song wee use shall be our husbands' (III, 12)—the playing on terms like 'shuttle-coke' (II, 11), the allusions to kisses given 'before' or 'behind' (II, 213), and an ejaculation like 'de cock of my humore is downe' (III, 222) are all things which one has met with often enough before. Shakespeare is full of them. Nor am I concerned with honestly Rabelaisian passages, where one is conscious more of the robust gusto of the expression than of any furtiveness: 'And when he is dead Ile pisse on his grave' (II, 120) or 'Ile make him fart crackers before I ha done with him' (II, 124). These are the quite normal hazards that Elizabethan Drama offers to the squeamish, and one takes them rather as a matter of course. What we get in Marston is something much more disagreeable, and happily much less common: namely the quite gratuitous and wilful introduction of *double entendre*, often into a context where it figures most uneasily. The bad characters have, of course, their ration of this sort of speech, and so do the clowns. Jack Drum tells Winifred that he is thankful to have her willing to prostrate her 'faire partes' to his pleasure (III, 220); Holifernes Pippo says that he is willing to serve Simplicius 'and please my grand-mother when I come to years of discretion' (II, 256); Simplicius himself remarks that Albano lies as open to his understanding 'as a Curtizan', and tells us that he has paid for his 'knowing of men and women too' in his days (II, 267); Herod proposes 'a health as deepe as a female' (II, 160); Pasarello the fool tells his master that he will stand for his lady 'most willingly and most uprightly' (I, 177); and Maquerelle the bawd warns us that 'in Scorpio t'is very dangerous medling' (I, 202). The significance of such remarks may not, fortunately, be very obvious here but of course in their context it is clear enough: Marston is simply angling for the titters of those like his quondam acquaintance, the Inns of Court men. Angling of this kind was no doubt common enough, and normally one would not pay much attention to it; but here one does sooner or later begin to feel that there is a deal too much of it and that, though it may be condoned in a writer of farces and knockabout comedies, it is hardly the sort of writing for a satirical moralist to favour.

It is an even more serious matter when we find this sort of speech occurring, as if quite normally, between the 'good' characters, or entering into contexts where it obviously has no right to appear. Something of this appears in the treatment of Rossaline in *Antonio and Mellida* where the reader is likely to object, not to her continuous, faintly lascivious tone—for that is really a legitimate device for presenting her as a rather likeable, forthright hussy—but to the occasional and unnecessary exaggera-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion of her sensuality ('Ile spit in thy mouth, and thou wilt, to grace thee'—I, 23) and to the way in which, more or less in relation to her, dogs and bitches are so often associated with women (23, 25). This association is all too common: it appears also in *What You Will* (II, 239) and in *The Malcontent* (I, 153) and in each case one feels that it could be happily expunged. On the same page of *The Malcontent* we have an even more striking piece of unpleasantness, where Malevole enquires of Bilioso:

> 'Did your sinniorship ne're see a pigeon house that was smooth, round, and white without, and full of holes and stinke within, ha ye not old Courtier?'

In view of the fact that Malevole later (166) calls Bilioso 'pigeon-house' one can hardly miss the leering coprophily here and as usual one would be glad to dispense with it. Even if a reader is prepared to allow to Malevole, as being a malcontent, an exceptional degree of conversational licence it is less easy to excuse the gross chuckling that we sometimes find in a character like Quadratus in *What You Will*. This is he, let us remember, who sees in earthly beauty an intimation of divine power (II, 279) and who remarks to Simplicius 'Renounce the world, the flesh, the Divell . . .' (286); this is he, in fact, who acts as a satirical-moral Chorus throughout the play. Yet this is also he whom we find joking about kisses given 'behind' (282) and making sly references to the sexual perversions practised by Father Time (284). Are we not entitled to repeat the charges of *The Whipping of the Satyre* against *The Scourge of Villanie*, and to declare that this is merely to 'hypocrite it with a shew of zeale'? It seems to me significant that in two of the plays that are conspicuous for their moralized plot-structure—the one (*The Dutch Courtezan*) a tale of the downfall of a prostitute, the other (*The Insatiate Countess*) a rather Websterian account of a promiscuous noblewoman's destruction—this element of the unsavoury should be at its strongest. The very first page (III, 5) of *The Insatiate Countess* gives us some of the worst examples, and the play proceeds through such matters as a prolonged discussion of the painlessness of a fall 'betweene a womens legs' (24), and the Countess' confession that when her 'loath'd Mate Shall struggle in due pleasure for his right' she'll think of him as her lover 'and die in that delight' (27), with minor obscenities from Abigail (21, 29) thrown in as a make-weight. No attempt is made to treat this sort of speech with reprehension, or to relate it to the moral tenor of the plot. It is indulged in for its own sake, with evident relish, and consequently seems quite out of place. Again, in *The Dutch Courtezan*, where 'the difference betwixt the love of a Curtezan, and a wife, is the full scope of the Play' (II, 69), and where it would seem to be in order to expect that unchastity should be consistently decried, we are given such things as the clown's valediction ('Keepe your *Syring* straight, and your *Lotium* unspilt' 77), the bawdy chatter of Mistress Mulligrub (107), and in fact a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more or less constant undertone of minor improprieties. The result is that the intention of the plot is quite muffled. Francischina sings of the nightingale that loves 'to sleepe gainst prickle' (79), Crispinella speaks of 'unholsome Reversions' (113), Cocledemoy of a 'plump rumpt wench, with a breast Softer then a Courtyers tongue, an old Ladies gums, Or an old mans *mentula*' (as Dr. Wood notes, Marston has lifted this from Catullus: see 116 and 323), and later on he mentions 'a puncks taille, that serves every body' (132). One has to add to these passages others in which the unpleasantness is more emetic. Francischina says of her rival 'Ick could scratch out her eyes, and sucke the holes' (89); when Mulligrub refers to the halberdiers as 'scabs' one of them retorts 'He shall find matter in us scabs I warrant' (122); and Tysefew tells Crispinella that he has drunk urine on her account (113)—thus apparently proving his devotion. Marston seems himself to have suspected that he was carrying things too far and at one point in the play (98-9) he incorporates snippets from Montaigne's essay *On Some Verses of Virgil* (III, v) the general drift of which is 'I dare as boldly speake venery, as think venery'. But the excuse will hardly hold. One need not object to the bawdy passages simply on the grounds that they are objectionable in themselves (though I think most readers would agree that they are, very), for there is the more immediate criticism to make against them: that they undermine whatever consistency and coherence the plays might otherwise possess. Where a dramatist adopts a moralizing approach to his material, lights upon moralized plots, and uses Satire as a persistent commentary on the ethical deficiencies of his characters and of the world in general, where in short the whole bias of his plays is much closer to instruction than to entertainment (or should be), then he is surely obliged to respect the limits of his medium and to work within the convention he has chosen. There is a sort of decorum involved but it is of an intimate and integral nature, a matter of artistic effect, and not, like the 'decorum' of Restoration criticism, a restraint imposed from outside. Marston, by his continual fingering of *double entendre* and impropriety, upsets this decorum and nullifies those very effects which he is apparently most concerned to make. It is almost as though we found Donne surpassing his grosser *Elegies* while ostensibly writing the *Holy Sonnets*. Comparisons with other poets are not easy to make, but it might be pointed out that the weaknesses in Marston's own satires give a very apt parallel for the faults we find in his plays. And if we turn to his contemporaries who were writing *dramas* the relative assessment of these satirical plays is easy to determine. It is in the light of what a dramatist like Jonson or Tourneur did with Satire that Marston's failure is best appreciated.

JOHN PETER.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE 'DOCTOR FAUSTUS' OF THOMAS MANN

IT is pleasant to see that the publishers of the English translation of Thomas Mann's latest novel[1] have graced its dustcover with a 'blurb' which is sufficiently intelligent to deserve another name. It may serve as an introduction to these notes:

> 'This novel, which has as its narrative framework a modern version of the Faust legend, is the entire life-story of a great creative musician—Adrian Leverkühn (1885-1940). It is told by his lifelong friend, Serenus Zeitblom, Ph.D. . . . A theological student turned composer, Leverkühn symbolically enters into a pact with the Devil (who is represented in part by an exhilarating but wasting, disease). He sells his soul and body in return for twenty-four years of musical genius. . . . Scarcely secondary in interest to Leverkühn himself is the narrator, Zeitblom, a scrupulous, learned, scholarly, shocked man, who tells much against his will, almost by inadvertence. . . . Through Mann's sovereign handling of his astonishing materials, *Doctor Faustus* achieves a many-layered credibility. The wonderful and terrible career of Adrian Leverkühn—including the gestation, actual writing, and inner nature of his chief compositions—is therefore thoroughly engaging as a narrative and symbolic of the purposes and dilemmas of twentieth-century man'.

The peculiar nature of *Doctor Faustus* consists in its multi-stratification. But it is this that makes the novel so difficult to write about. One's commentary also needs to be many-layered, and

---

[1] *Doktor Faustus, das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers, Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde.* Bermann-Fischer Verlag, Stockholm, 1947.
Doctor Faustus, The Life of the German Composer, Adrian Leverkühn, as told by a friend. Secker and Warburg, London, 1949. 'Since in the creative act word and thought are indivisible, the task was seen to be one before which artists would shrink and logical minds recoil'. (Translator's note to *The Magic Mountain*). Mrs. H. T. Lowe-Porter, who in effect has carried a whole literary *œuvre* from one language into another, has never under-estimated the difficulties of translation. Judging by her apologetic note in the English version of *Doktor Faustus* I think she had under-estimated the success, illogical or otherwise, which she has achieved in this urgent task. One feels rather ashamed to suggest that perhaps the archaic English of the translation is sometimes rather *more* persistently archaic, 'quaint', than the archaic German of the original.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there are so many things to say about the work that, in the end, the critic may have failed to convey the very aspect which he has set out to stress: I mean its unity—the astounding skill with which Mann has finally merged his 'layers' one into the other so that, at the time of reading, one is hardly aware of any stratification as such. The reader is conscious of the work's steady penetrating movement: wheel engages smoothly with wheel: it is the critic's job to point to the intricate hidden system of gearing and to trace from that the varying speeds within the one movement. Added to this success of unity is the success of 'credibility'. The story, after all, is dreadfully credible: quite as credible as, say, Fielding's misadventures in India or the Ramsays' trip to the lighthouse. Thomas Mann has never been a teller of fairy tales or a spinner of mystical teutonic allegories; his first novel, *Buddenbrooks* (published when he was twenty-five), demonstrates his sense of actuality, his early grounding in the ways of the 'realistic novel', and this quality of mind, this education, has stood him in good stead in his later dealings with the Devil. It takes a good realist to make a convincing symbolist.

Mann has been influenced by a number of distinguished German thinkers—for instance, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner and Freud—but it is Goethe to whom he owes the greatest debt: not the borrowing of a thought here and there, but a whole cast of mind, shown most obviously in a sense of balance, a remarkable spiritual poise. The sense of balance, I mean, which preserved Hans Castorp safe and sound on the perilous peaks of the Magic Mountain and which enabled the author of *Death in Venice* to describe the downfall of Aschenbach from the very position, courageously on the brink of the abyss, from which the moral avalanche swept away that respected man of letters. Other manifestations come to mind: the ability to examine perversion and then to report on it with a clean tongue (unlike the Dr. Krokowski of *The Magic Mountain*); to sympathise with disease without exhorting to it; to commend the healthy spirit without evading the difficulty of defining that adjective; to be an artist among the *bourgeoisie* and then, with an agile twist, a *bourgeois* among the artists; to be, in the same moment, a thorough German and a good European; to plunge into a cloud of metaphysical subtleties and then to emerge as dry and precise as ever, bearing one or two clear and very 'human' conceptions—all this is what we mean by the name 'Goethe'. Mann's *Doctor Faustus* is the greatest contribution, both in itself and as tribute, to the Bi-Centennial celebrations of 1949.

The following notes on the novel fall into four sections: the character of Zeitblom; the character of Leverkühn; the character of Leverkühn's disease; and the character of art and of the artist.

* * * *

In his *History of the German Novelle* (1934), Mr. E. K. Bennett stated that 'Thomas Mann's work as a creative writer was already done in *Buddenbrooks*, and the characters which he presents in his later works are merely carriers of ideas, representatives of attitudes

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of mind and points of view. This is particularly true of *Der Zauberberg* which, with all its intellectual, critical and philosophical richness, does not contain a single living being. Even Peeperkorn is an idea and not a person of flesh and blood'. Not even the literary-historian's urge to classify fictional characters under such headings as 'realistic' or 'symbolic' can excuse so rash a statement. There is admittedly a great deal of discussion of ideas as such between the various characters of *The Magic Mountain,* but it is the special distinction of the novel that the expressed idea always fits the character who expresses it, that the idea is used to create a character at the same time as the character serves to expound an idea. To me *The Magic Mountain* doesn't mean a set of diverse points of view: it means Settembrini and Naphta and Peeperkorn and Clavdia Chauchat and a host of minor figures (among them such unintellectual creatures as Frau Stöhr, whose brightest idea is that the *Erotica* should be played at the grave of the courageous Joachim). Let the reader who has not looked at *The Magic Mountain* for some time try to remember what 'ideas' and 'attitudes of mind and points of view' are embodied in that novel. I believe that he will first think of the magnificently substantial characters I have named and then, by a process of deduction, re-create the ideas and attitudes. There is something of Dickens or Tolstoy in Mann's ability to create character by the repeated gesture or the accumulated detail, by the typical response to situation or the half-said sentence. This 'realism' of his—if we must use the word—this characteristic method of the novelist of the grand style, is what prevents him becoming the kind of novelist Mr. Bennett has described above—Mann's work in fiction is full of flesh and blood, it by no means suffers from anæmia of the pernicious idea—*that* description is apt enough for some of the more intelligent contemporary English novelists, but there is absolutely no point of contact between a novel by Mann and a novel by (say) Aldous Huxley.

Zeitblom, the narrator, the 'friend' of the title, is an admirable piece of work; no doubt some future commentator will indulge in the paradoxical remark that it is he, really, who is the hero of *Doctor Faustus*. But he is hardly a hero: he is a cultured 'famulus', an ennobled Wagner, to Leverkühn's Faust; he is the Chorus in this tragedy (and the Messenger as well); he is a civilized German scholar of the nineteenth century mould; and musically he is the symbol of the 'good listener'. If Zeitblom, rather than Leverkühn, seems the hero of the book, it is because he is full of good meaty character, though quite devoid of greatness, while Leverkühn, though a great artist, fails to give much more impression of 'character' than would be conveyed by a highly intellectual and ironic gnome. A state of affairs which is wholly deliberate.

Here is Serenus Zeitblom, Ph.D.—he will do his best to live up to his name:

> 'I am by nature wholly moderate, of a temper, I may say, both healthy and humane, addressed to reason and harmony; a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scholar and *conjuratus* of the "Latin host', not lacking all contact with the arts (I play the viola d'amore) . . .

The picture, for the time being, is completed in a few further sentences:

' . . . the dæmonic, little as I presume to deny its influence upon human life, I have at all times found utterly foreign to my nature. Instinctively I have rejected it from my picture of the cosmos and never felt the slightest inclination rashly to open the door to the powers of darkness. . . . But my self-satisfaction or, if you prefer, my ethical narrow-mindedness can only strengthen my doubt whether I may feel myself truly called to my present task'.

Zeitblom is no Ancient Mariner: throughout he protests against the duty which fate has so cruelly laid upon him: the tale, in a tradition 'altogether foreign to the blitheness of classical culture', is told, slowly and painstakingly and always against the better feelings of this good old humanist. He is, of course, exactly the right man for the task; no-one can tell a ghost story as well as the person who has seen too much of ghosts either to disbelieve in them or to approve of them. The reluctant Zeitblom is as apt for his rôle in this novel as was Hans Castorp as the colourless hero of *The Magic Mountain* or Wilhelm Meister as the 'milksop' hero of Goethe's novel.

If Zeitblom looms larger than his subject, Adrian Leverkühn, it is not only on account of this question of character, but also because it is through him that we pass from one layer of the novel to another, it is he who so to speak is the gearbox of this great machine. Apart from the tragic life of his friend (which comprises the top layer of significance), it necessarily happens that we see the minor characters through Zeitblom's eyes (at the same time as we see him through theirs), and furthermore, the aspect of the novel as a study of German character and history is revealed to us directly through Zeitblom's mind—aptly enough, since in many ways he is a typical German of a celebrated kind, 'Gymnasialprofessor . . . Dozent an der theologischen Hochschule', a 'good German', to use the language of yesterday.

But the story of Germany and the story of Leverkühn are not, ultimately, separate things—the former is not the background to the latter, or *vice versa*. To say that the story of the gifted tragic composer is an allegory of the fate of modern Germany, that his greatness is symbolic of hers, his sin of hers, his end of hers: this is to reduce the novelist's delicacy to the commentator's crudity. But the commentator must bear his responsibilities, shameful as they sometimes are, and at least one can say that this crudity is patent enough and far from sufficiently seductive to cast any very pernicious spell. We notice firstly this passage in the *Epilogue* (written after the fall of Germany):

'Germany herself, the unhappy nation, is strange to me, utterly strange and that because, convinced of her awful end, I drew back from her sins and hid from them in my seclusion. Must

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I not ask myself whether or not I did right? And again: did I actually do it? I have clung to one man, one suffering, significant human being, clung unto death; and I have depicted his life, which never ceased to fill me with love and grief. To me it seems as though this loyalty might atone for my having fled in horror from my country's guilt'.

And then, following the account of Leverkühn's funeral, the paragraph with which the novel ends:

'Germany, the hectic on her cheek, was reeling then at the height of her dissolute triumphs, about to gain the whole world by virtue of the one pact she was minded to keep, which she had signed with her blood. Today, clung round by demons, a hand over one eye, with the other staring into horrors, down she flings from despair to despair. When will she reach the bottom of the abyss? When, out of uttermost hopelessness—a miracle beyond the power of belief—will the light of hope dawn? A lonely man folds his hands and speaks: "God be merciful to thy poor soul, my friend, my Fatherland!" '

The grouping together, the tentative identification, of Leverkühn and Germany cannot be missed here: 'Gott sei euerer armen Seele gnädig, mein Freund, mein Vaterland'. Even so, I think we should be wise not to read back through the book to check up on the implied parallel.

The former of these two passages suggests, I think, a further identification: Mann identifies himself with Zeitblom occasionally, though only when it serves his purpose, and no longer. A good European though he is, Mann knows how much he owes to the distinguished intellectual traditions of Germany, for more than any other living author he embodies them to-day and preserves them. However much Mann may elsewhere smile at his Dr. Zeitblom, I do not think it was with any irony that he put these words in that honest mouth:

'If it be true, as we say in Germany, that every way to the right goal must also be right in each of its parts, then it will be agreed that the way that led to this sinful issue—I use the word in its strictest, most religious sense—was everywhere wrong and fatal, at every single one of its turns, however bitter it may be for love to consent to such logic. To recognize because we must our infamy is not the same thing as to deny our love. I, a simple German man and scholar, have loved much that is German'.

'Ich . . habe viel Deutsches geliebt'. With such diverse emotions and attitudes behind the creation of Zeitblom, states of mind ranging from an impersonal mischievous irony to a strong emotional identification, it is all the more striking that Zeitblom should emerge as so smooth, rounded, consistent and uninvolved a piece of characterization.

* * * *

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now for Adrian Leverkühn, the central figure in this novel. Leverkühn is a musical genius—and Mann's conception of genius is in the best sense technical, it has little to do with the romantic artist of *The Constant Nymph* type of fiction—but he is not really a 'character', not in the sense that Zeitblom is. Taciturn, shy (or contemptuous) of ordinary social life, ironical throughout, and sometimes a little unkind to his faithful Zeitblom, he is far from sympathetic as we see him as his friends saw him. In that aspect he appears as genius rather than as human being. His failure in the latter capacity is best shown in his short and disastrous appearance as lover: the vain and rather trivial Schwerdtfeger steals the girl, Marie Godeau, from under his nose. (In the terms of the pact, as the Devil says, 'Love is forbidden you, in so far as it warms. Thy life shall be cold, therefore thou shalt love no human being'. And Leverkühn's one requited love—for his little nephew, Nepomuk—ends in the shocking death of the loved one). It is, in fact, difficult to comprehend the grounds of Zeitblom's close and loyal attachment to him: that is best explicable, perhaps, in symbolic terms. Their relationship is that of the cultured audience to the original genius: what the former gives is a loving admiration mixed with a certain lack of comprehension and a firm determination not to interfere, while what the latter demands, in a spirit of detached mockery, is a fair degree of understanding, a good deal of patience, and the 'being there if needed'.

But then there comes the other aspect of Adrian Leverkühn: the human being as it emerges during the excruciatingly painful 'Last Supper', when the twenty-four years of genius-life ('Zeit hast du von uns genommen, geniale Zeit, hochtragende Zeit, volle vierundzwanzig Jahr ab dato recessi, die setzen wir dir zum Ziel') have come to an end. 'Forsake me not! Be about me at my hour!' We have been prepared for this by the revelation in Chapter XXV of the pact which Leverkühn has made with the Devil . . . or the pact which Leverkühn imagined himself to have made with the devil (in that case betraying early signs of mental instability) . . . or the allegory which Leverkühn wrote as a bitter celebration of his absolute dedication to a relentlessly exacting art and his consequent withdrawal from 'the life of humanity'—a process like that which Rilke to some extent underwent, of accepting art and rejecting life, represented as a kind of sinister compact which carries considerable danger for him who makes it . . .

This is the moment to glance at the episode of the pact. In exchange for his twenty-four years of painful productivity Leverkühn has resigned his soul to Hell; in an extremely powerful passage the Devil tells him what he can expect:

> 'One must just be satisfied with symbolism, my good man, when one is speaking of hell, for there everything ends—not only the word that describes, but everything altogether . . . *"here everything leaves off"*. Every compassion, every grace, every sparing, every last trace of consideration for the incredulous,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imploring objection "that you verily cannot do so unto a soul": it is done, it happens, and indeed without being called to any reckoning in words; in soundless cellar, far down beneath God's hearing, and happens to all eternity. . . . this everlasting dispensation of the unbelievable combined with the irresponsible. Nothing forgetting the dismal groans of lust mixed therewith; since endless torment, with no possible collapse, no swoon to put a period thereto, degenerates into shameful pleasure, wherefore such as have some intuitive knowledge speak indeed of the "lusts of hell" . . . .

'To your assurance be it said, even hell will not afford you aught essentially new, only the more or less accustomed, and proudly so. It is at bottom only a continuation of the extravagant existence. To knit up in two words its quintessence, or if you like its chief matter, is that it leaves its denizens only the choice between extreme cold and an extreme heat which can melt granite. Between these two states they flee roaring to and fro, for in the one the other always seems heavenly refreshment but is at once and in the most hellish meaning of the word intolerable. . . .'

A fairly orthodox description, but not unsubtle; certainly more dreadful than the sophisticated underworld of Sartre's *Huis Clos*. And the Devil's account is susceptible of at least three interpretations: firstly, it can indeed be Hell; secondly, it can be a frightening description of madness (the madness which a life of tense creative effort may end in: 'Darum . . . wird dir denn auch die Hölle nichts wesentlich Neues . . . nur eine Fortsetzung des extravaganten Daseins') thirdly, it can be read as a shocking description of the Nazi concentration camps—the madness of Germany.[2]

Chapter XXV, then, has been a preparation for the moment when the Devil will claim his due, but it is not the kind of preparation to soften the blow. The 'human' Adrian Leverkühn emerges only as the strife between sanity and insanity reaches its crisis, only in those few minutes before his mind collapses. It is a rather bitter thought for us to dwell on, but the hopelessly mad Leverkühn, 'creeping back broken to his mother's arms', is 'human', 'sympathetic', almost 'lovable', where the sane Leverkühn, the great composer, was inhuman, antipathetic, and even rather detestable in his sinister ability. The crisis itself, the 'Last Supper'—for undoubtedly Leverkühn is to be seen both as sinner and as martyr—the frightful murmurings in Lutheran German of the musician, the rapidly disappearing, disapproving audience, and then Leverkühn's paralytic stroke as he plays the first chords of his *Lamentation of Dr. Faustus*—all this is only bearable, perhaps, because it has happened instead of something else which would have been still less bearable. I mean, the appearance of the Devil,

[2]See on this point an article, 'Thomas Mann on Philosophy and Religion', by Dr. J. Lesser, *Contemporary Review*, November, 1949.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in flesh and blood or in sulphur and flame—for Mann has by now so firmly captured his reader that the latter cannot take shelter behind any of his normal beliefs or disbeliefs: if Mann chooses to bring on the Devil, the reader shudders to think, then on the Devil will come, whether I 'believe in' him or not. The Devil comes and goes, unseen; and we take refuge in Zeitblom's great grief for his friend, for this is something 'natural' and 'human', something that we are used to and can easily understand.

Leverkühn, human or otherwise, will remind the reader of various literary and artistic figures, in respect both of life and of work. Mann acknowledges his debt, in musical theory, to Schönberg, but this is the least striking. The episode concerning the loyal lady admirer who lends Leverkühn her castle for a brief holiday but whom by arrangement he never meets, brings to mind both Tchaikovsky and Rilke. These one might contribute to the list of resemblances already compiled by commentators. In a rather strange article entitled 'Nietzsche et le *Doktor Faustus* de Thomas Mann'[3] M. Maurice Colleville has enumerated with something stronger than distaste the many parallels between Leverkühn and Nietzsche: 'Il ne s'agit plus d'une influence de thèmes: C'est la vie même de Nietzsche que Thomas Mann a transposée dans l'existence du compositeur Adrian Leverkühn.' The main similarities are these: both died at the age of fifty-five; both contracted syphilis which ended in madness, the progress of the disease being closely similar; both studied theology before turning in the one case to philosophy, in the other to music. The conception of inspiration which the Devil expresses during his interview with Leverkühn corresponds very closely to that given in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. The young Nietzsche, on a visit to Cologne, engaged a dragoman to show him the sights; asked to lead the way to a decent restaurant, this man took him to a brothel—precisely the same thing happens to Leverkühn in Leipzig, as recounted in the 'Erlebnis mit dem fatalen Dienstmann', and the details of these unintended visits, comic in themselves but both tragic in their consequences, are also identical.

M. Colleville appears to find all this 'plagiarism' not quite *comme il faut*; under great restraint he writes:

> 'En bref, le *Doktor Faustus* fournit une fois de plus la preuve que, de tous les écrivains allemands de ce temps, son auteur est sans doute celui qui s'est le plus profondément assimilé la pensée de ses devanciers. Du passé récent ou lointain de la littérature de son pays, il a tiré la fleur de la culture dont il orne ses livres'.[4]

---

[3] *Etudes Germaniques*, Avril-Septembre, 1948.

[4] The letter of this statement, though not the spirit, is correct enough. In the good sense of the word, Mann is and always has been a 'traditional' author—he derives much of his strength, his ability to work in masses, from this fact—as for the flowers which he has stolen from other men's gardens, the way in which he has arranged them gives him the right to be called an 'original' author, as well.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Has M. Colleville forgotten such inspired 'plagiarists' as Shakespeare, or his own La Fontaine? A cogent answer to this scholarly but misguided attack has been made by Dr. Hilde Zaloscer, who points out in an unpublished manuscript that Mann nowhere makes the slightest effort to conceal his borrowings (the closeness of the Nietzschean parallels is itself a testimony of his innocence) and that there exist similarities equally striking between his hero and two other famous Germans—Dürer (who died at the same age, of the same disease) and the composer Schumann. In fact, Dr. Zaloscer sums up, 'Leverkühn est composé consciemment —comme une immense mosaïque—par des éléments appartenant aux figures tragiques des artistes damnés'. Exactly, and Mann's original genius is displayed in the merging together of these elements into the unified figure of his tragic hero and, furthermore, in the merging of the completed Leverkühn among the other elements of the novel in such a way that it is never submerged or distorted by, nor in conflict with, the other preoccupations of the author.

The critic examining the structure of *Doctor Faustus* can amuse himself by compiling a list of possible tragic heroes: besides Leverkühn, the defeated artist, there is the defeat of art itself in an inimical world, there is Zeitblom, the defeated *bourgeois* scholar, there is the defeated figure of Germany (tragic in the way that Macbeth is tragic, by the wastage of great possibilities, the misuse of great powers), there is also the apparent defeat of modern civilization (Zeitblom looks in vain for the Malcolm who will purify and resuscitate his country, the 'medicine of the sickly weal'). . . . Under such circumstances it would be perverse to search out plagiarisms from reality, to try to split up the character of Leverkühn into so many per cent. Neitzsche, so many per cent. Schumann and so on. If one objects to Mann's dealings with actuality, then one will object to practically all his work, and *Lotte in Weimar* and the Joseph novels must be thrown into the fire without further ado, as the impertinences of an incompetent and dishonest crypto-biographer. Such an activity calls to mind the good burghers of Lübeck, scandalized on the publication of *Buddenbrooks*.

* * * *

One might have objected to the phrase in the 'blurb', 'the Devil . . . is represented in part by an exhilarating, but wasting, disease', as a rather hypocritical euphemism, were it not that the disease is never mentioned by name in the book either. The whole treatment of this delicate question is uncannily effective. The approach to the symptoms is by way of Andersen's story of the mermaid who fell in love with a human prince. The Devil first tells of the story to Leverkühn, and the latter repeats it later to Zeitblom at a time when he is suffering one of the periodic attacks of pain ('die oft excessiven Kopfschmerzen in einer wühlenden Qual in und über beiden Augen bestanden') which confined him to a completely darkened room. He jocularly likens his own pains to the knife-pains

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which the beautiful sea-maid must endure as the penalty of gaining her new human legs, asking ironically whether it was worth-while after all—wouldn't the prince have loved her much more with her fish-tail? The allegory is simple enough: as an artist, Leverkühn has deliberately sacrificed his bodily and mental ease: he too walks upon knives of steel. His whimsical comments on the natural beauty and aptness of the maid's form before she exchanged her tail are seen as a wry reference to the healthy happiness of the ordinary citizen and to the apparent gratuitousness of the artist's sufferings: 'she became so pathetically déclassée after she had bought herself legs, which nobody thanked her for'. The knife-pains in the sea-maid's legs become the accepted symbol for the manifestations of Leverkühn's disease and this is interwoven, as a *leit-motiv*, with the other themes of the work.

The idea of using syphilis as the symbol for the disease whereby the creative artist often pays for his special privileges was obviously a very risky one, since it is more usually looked upon as the wages of something less noble. Consumption, it might be thought, would have been more tactful: it too is a disease which is 'exhilarating, but wasting', it implies no dubious antecedents, and it is the traditional artistic malady. But Mann makes use of syphilis as his symbol, and uses it magnificently: it has that ambiguous flavour, both squalid and horrible, which consorts well with his seedy yet sinister portrayal of the Devil, and the feeling that it might be solely the unlucky result of a sordid encounter is precluded by his skilful handling of the situation. Leverkühn's introduction to the brothel is comic and a little painful and quite chaste, and his later visit to his 'Esmeralda'—with whom he insists on spending the night although she warns him against herself—has the effect of a deliberate, cold-blooded act of immolation. As such, it is a preliminary to—or foreshadowing of—the formal 'set' pact with the Devil which takes place four years later.

* * * *

The artist has always impressed Mann as a profoundly equivocal figure. Reference on this point to the short stories alone would provide matter for a substantial thesis: here we need only mention Tonio Kröger, the 'artist with a bad conscience', the striking down of the 'healthy' writer Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*, and Christian and Gerda Buddenbrook—the latter, in her husband's eyes, 'an artist, an individual, a puzzling, fascinating creature'—who both play a mysterious part in the fall of the House of Buddenbrook.[5] This old and constant preoccupation of Mann's is carried

[5]Dr. Zaloscer points out this prefigurement of the apparition of the Devil at the beginning of the pact scene: Christian is speaking to his brother: 'Passieren dir vielleicht solche Dinge, dass, wenn du in der Dämmerung in dein Zimmer kommst, du auf deinem Sofa einen Mann sitzen siehst, der dir zunickt und dabei überhaupt gar nicht vorhanden ist?'

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to a climax in *Doctor Faustus*: it comprises one of the book's most important 'layers'. Mann has done better than merely talk about the question, as he did in some of his essays; in one of these, *Freud and the Future,* he remarked of Nietzsche,

> 'He well knew what he owed to his morbid state, and on every page he seems to instruct us that there is no deeper knowledge without experience of disease, and that all heightened healthiness must be achieved by the route of illness'.

The situation, Mann now seems to say, is not so simple as we used to think. What 'heightened healthiness' does Leverkühn achieve? His music is realized in the atmosphere of the sick-room, but the impression we have of it is not entirely encouraging: it is great music, but it is dreadful—even the faithful Zeitblom, the 'good listener', regards it with a certain profound distrust. *The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus* is the last and crowning work of Leverkühn's career, and Zeitblom takes the best part of a chapter in describing it:

> 'the *Lamentation* of the son of hell, the lament of men and God, issuing from the subjective, but always broadening out and as it were laying hold on the Cosmos; the most frightful lament ever set up on this earth'.

He praises it in the highest terms: it is a vital work, he tells us, it is (he suggests hesitantly) a work of liberation with tremendous significance for the future of music (and, on another plane, for the future of Germany). But in it, as in Leverkühn's other music, he finds to his dread 'the substantial identity of the most blest with the most curst' ('die substanzielle Identität des Seligsten mit dem Grässlichsten'). The work centres round a theme inspired by a certain passage of the text, in the *Oratio Fausti ad Studiosos*: 'For I die as a good and as a bad Christian', that is, I have sold my soul to the Devil and yet I repent of having done so. But, Zeitblom says, there is an inversion of the idea of the temptation of Christ—

> 'Faust rejects as temptation the thought of being saved: not only out of formal loyalty to the pact and because it is "too late", but because with his whole soul he despises the positivism of the world for which one would save him, the lie of its godliness'.

The work is entirely uncompromising: 'this dark tone-poem permits up to the very end no consolation, appeasement, transfiguration.' But yet Zeitblom sees, at the end of the great lament, a ray of hope, 'ein Licht in der Nacht'—in technical terms, 'the high G of a cello, the last word, the last fainting sound, slowly dying in a pianissimo-fermata'. Are we to see in this only Zeitblom's hopeful humanistic nature, his Goethean aversion to irreconcilable situations? In any case, the hope is a difficult one, harder and more disturbing than complete despair.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'The route of illness—that Mann has mapped out with painful clarity and detail, while the 'heightened healthiness' remains as something vague and remote. Leverkühn has had his stroke, his acquaintances among the intelligentsia have left his chamber, shocked and uncomprehending, and on another temporal plane (as Zeitblom is bringing his narrative to a close) the Allied armies are entering Germany's shattered towns. The experience of disease as Nietzsche knew it is naked in the story of Adrian Leverkühn, but even Zeitblom, though so well equipped by nature and education to seek out the human usefulness of a thing, is hard pressed to squeeze any positive significance out of the 'deeper knowledge' which Leverkühn has presumably won for humanity. What remains with us is the thought that Leverkühn's work *may* mean a liberation of music, and, if it is that, it will be more than that. But one can only judge a liberation—of whatever kind—by the events that follow it. The value of Leverkühn's music is a value for the future . . . to slip on to another plane, the purgation by fire of the German nation will only show its effects in the future.

However all that may be, the position of the creative artist is perhaps uniquely difficult to-day: it is more perplexed than in the days of Tonio Kröger. In the confession which he makes to his assembled friends when his 'hour' has come, Leverkühn says:

> 'it is the time when uprightly and in pious sober wise, naught of work is to be wrought and art grown unpossible without the divel's help and fires of hell under the cauldron. . . .'

These words cannot be taken as the babblings of a man already out of his mind, for they are simply the culmination of a series of comments and statements on the position of the contemporary artist and the state of contemporary art which have been made by various people from the very beginning of the novel. Leverkühn has said similar things before, though coolly and ironically, as was his wont, in a dispassionate tone of voice, rather as a cotton broker might remark on the slackness of the market. Here, for instance, is Leverkühn as a schoolboy of fifteen (the period then being the turn of the century):

> 'For a cultural epoch, there seems to me to be a spot too much talk about culture in ours, don't you think? I'd like to know whether epochs that possessed culture knew the word at all, or used it. . . . Technique and comfort—in that state one talks about culture but one has not got it. Will you prevent me from seeing in the homophone-melodic constitution of our music a condition of musical civilization—in contrast to the old contrapuntal polyphone culture? '

And when the Devil appears to Leverkühn, he accuses him of losing his temper 'because I shewed you your despairing heart and set before your eyes with the expert's insight the difficulties absolutely inseparable from composition to-day'.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is a further implication. The moderate Zeitblom himself has remarked that 'genius is a form of vital power deeply experienced in illness, creating out of illness, through illness creative'. Now, the more difficult the period is for the artist, the deeper he must descend into disease to win that 'heightened healthiness'—in a way he is the scapegoat of his civilization—and the more likely he is to yield to disease, leaving behind him his treasure, highly problematic and, at the best, only for 'the others'. The extreme form of this conception is expressed by the Devil:

> 'creative, genius-giving disease, disease that rides on high horse over all hindrances, and springs with drunken daring from peak to peak, is a thousand times dearer to life than plodding healthiness. I have never heard anything stupider than that from disease only disease can come . . .
> 'You will lead the way, you will strike up the march of the future, the lads will swear by your name, who thanks to your madness will no longer need to be mad. On your madness they will feed in health, and in them you will become healthy'.

'Das sagt dir der unverballhornte Sammael'. And indeed only 'the venomous Angel' could be the suitable mouth for the utterance of such a sentiment. 'Der Künstler ist der Bruder des Verbrechers und des Verrückten'.

Even so, it is a sentiment which Mann has been working his way towards for some time. He came near to expressing it in the arguments of Naphta, the cynical anti-liberal of *The Magic Mountain*: 'the genius of disease is more human than the genius of health'. But in that novel the situation was resolved in a comparatively gentle and even genial way: in contrast to Naphta we have Settembrini, his stern opponent, the *encyclopédiste*, who says firmly 'disease and despair are often only forms of depravity'. In the resultant duel, Settembrini, the apostle of progress and optimism, fires his revolver in the air and offers his body (no doubt with a certain exaggerated nobility) to his rival. Naphta, the bitter authoritarian, cries 'Coward!' and shoots himself through the head. We feel that Mann only contrived to keep his sympathies, and ours, with Settembrini by a great effort of will. But nevertheless we are relieved that Hans Castorp, 'this still unwritten page', has escaped from Naphta's dark influence and glad that Settembrini is left to say goodbye to him at the railway station. In *Doctor Faustus* the problem is presented in less easily reconcilable terms: Zeitblom is a more thoughtful and less confident Settembrini, the Devil is a Naphta with more poise and much more power, and Leverkühn is a Castorp who is shut off from Castorp's way of salvation—escape into the life of the world, the life of action. It is incredible that one should ever come to think of *The Magic Mountain* as a simple, cheerful novel, with clear intentions and a straightforward resolution. Yet, compared with *Doctor Faustus*, it is exactly that.[6]

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thomas Mann's novel is as uncompromising as Leverkühn's *Lamentation of Doctor Faustus*. It, too, 'permits up to the very end no consolation, appeasement, transfiguration'. But the artistic paradox extends to Mann: at the end of *Doctor Faustus* also there is the 'high G of a cello'—and 'that tone . . . which was the voice of mourning, is so no more. It changes its meaning; it abides as a light in the night'. Tragedy affords us no consolation or appeasement, other than itself. And this, the experience of tragedy, is the finest that can be granted in a time of crisis. I think that Mann offers us such an experience in *Doctor Faustus*. It is this novel itself which, changing its meaning, grants us a light in the night—this novel and the fact that such work can still be achieved: hard, solid work which does not hesitate to be sometimes a little slow in order to be exhaustive, is not afraid to be serious, despises fashion, prizes the detail without rejecting the planned whole, and ultimately draws its amazing energy from the author's tenacity in clinging to 'the anti-diabolic faith, that mankind has after all a "keen hearing", and that words born of one's own striving may do it good and not perish from its heart'.[7]

D. J. ENRIGHT.

---

[6]Settembrini seems to be pointing the way to one aspect of *Doctor Faustus* when he says, after praising art and literature as valuable aids to human advancement,

> 'There is something suspicious about music, gentlemen. I insist that she is, by her nature, equivocal. I shall not be going too far in saying at once that she is politically suspect'.

And the remarks of Peeperkorn (who, without here attempting to put too fine a point on it, stands in the novel for 'Life' itself, unphilosophical and unmoral—that from which Settembrini and Naphta are abstractions or selections) that

> 'In the world of matter, all things were the vehicle of both life and death, all of them were medicinal and all poisonous, in fact therapeutics and toxicology were one and the same, man could be cured by poison, and substances known to be the bearers of life could kill at a thrust, in a single second of time—'

these remarks can be placed side by side with Zeitblom's description of Leverkühn's music ('the substantial identity of the most blest with the most curst'), with the suggested relation between art and disease, and with the words from the *Lamentation*, 'For I die as a good and as a bad Christian'.

[7]Conclusion of *Goethe's 'Faust'*, a lecture delivered at Princeton University in 1938, and printed in *Essays of Three Decades*.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

REVIEWS

THEORY AND CRITICISM

ENGLISH POETRY: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION, by F. W. Bateson (*Longmans,* 10/6).

In these days when critics are so frequently to be found lined up in parties and cliques, ordinary disinterestedness begins to assume the proportions of a positive virtue. It is at any rate a quality that must be allowed to Mr. Bateson. A scholar of some note, concerned with criticism and anxious to bring the two activities into closer relation, he belongs to no particular camp and is willing (up to a point) to consider all approaches on their merits. He believes that poetry matters and that the trained reading of poetry is a humane discipline. He wants to see the consolidation of a public of Common Readers: he has no use for academic conservatism; and he holds that it is more than time that romantic criticism should receive 'decent and final interment'.

From this promising general position Mr. Bateson sets out ambitiously to deal with a number of fundamental problems. The first section of this book is called 'The Definition of Poetry'. It begins with a chapter on 'The Primacy of Meaning' and follows fairly sensible and familiar lines in the dismissal of lingering romantic fallacies, especially in connexion with Pure Sound. This is similar to some of the early pages of *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, though Mr. Empson's account of the relation between sound and meaning was rather more subtle (Mr. Bateson, for example, neglects Paget's theories of analogical mouth-gestures) and in general stresses the functional nature of poetic devices like rhyme, metre and alliteration. Passing on to analyse some stock examples of 'incantation' Mr. Bateson re-defines the essential poetic activity as 'semantic synthesis'—one therefore not different in kind from ordinary intellectual processes. The devices of poetic form are a means of ensuring simultaneity and unity of impression rather than the analytic temporal sequence of prose. In its normal manifestation poetry involves four factors which must be in equilibrium: (i) the poet, (ii) his audience, (iii) a common language, (iv) a common literary tradition. The ultimate criterion in interpretation is what the poem meant to the social group to whom it was primarily addressed. The critic must start from the contemporary poets of his own social group: 'the man who is not prepared to understand the poetry of his own time *must* be incompetent to appreciate that of the past'. The content of poetry is 'human nature in its social relations' and at its best poetry is the means by which a society achieves 'its most significant self-expression—and ultimately its historic meaning'. This idea however is too general to serve as a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

critical tool: what actually finds expression in poetry is the human motive controlling the social behaviour of a society's dominant group. Distinguishing then five schools of poetry, Mr. Bateson proceeds to tabulate them in relation to five periods of social history and to summarize the corresponding 'dominant incentives' as follows:

1. Local Democracy of the Yeomanry: traditional egalitarianism based on country life (School of Chaucer).
2. Centralized Absolutism of the Prince's Servants: mystical individualism of the complete personality based on London (Renaissance School)
3. Oligarchy of Landed Interests: co-operative rationalism (non-specialized) based on country life but revolving round London (Augustan School).
4. Plutocracy of Business: mystical individualism (specialized) based on manufacturing towns (Romantic School).
5. Managerial State: co-operative rationalism (specialized) without local basis (Modern School).

Each school has a dominant feature of style, and within each school one can trace roughly five generations showing a curve of rise, culmination and decline. (The modern school ought to reach its peak about 1950!). Part II, 'Applications of the Definition' considers these hypotheses and critical formulae in relation to a series of representative poets and poems from Chaucer to Auden. The concluding section reopens the old discussion of the relative importance of the literary critic and the literary historian, coming down on the side of the latter, and considers the possibility of building up 'a poetry-reading élite'.

It will be apparent that Mr. Bateson shares a number of familiar modern critical ideas and that in the earlier chapters he has helped to clear away a good deal of the lumber that still clutters literary discussion.[1] On the other hand, when all allowance has been made for the difficulty of presenting an argument fairly in a brief summary, it will be obvious that the dangers of over-simplification in his table of schools and historical periods with their 'dominant incentives' are incalculable, whether from the point of view of literature or social history. For reassurance that his scheme is anything more than a bright idea worked out in the abstract with a certain neat ingenuity the reader will turn to examine Mr. Bateson's critical practice. He will find, unfortunately, that this is not reassuring. Here are some of the more general judgments:

[1] *e.g.* p. 74 'The game of attribution, as played by J. M. Robertson, Charles Crawford, Dugdale Sykes, etc., in the field of minor Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, is an enjoyable sport, with its own elaborate rules, but it should not now be mistaken for criticism'.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> . . . the synthetic element in the novel or play . . . is generally embodied in the plot and characterization rather than in the individual words and sentences . . . In a good novel or a good play the actual words should be absorbed by the reader or spectator almost without being noticed.
>
> Auden, whom I am inclined to think the greatest English poet since Keats.
>
> It is time Swift's status as a poet was reconsidered. Although his verse is uneven and often slipshod, at his best he seems to me one of the great English poets. I prefer him to Pope. Pope is a superb talker in verse, endlessly vivacious and amusing, but it is difficult to take him *or his opinions* very seriously [my italics].
>
> Waller's best poem 'A Panegyric to my Lord Protector' (*c.* 1654) is specifically political, one of the finest political poems in English. It might be described as a seventeenth-century equivalent of W. H. Auden's 'Spain' or of the 'Prologue' to his *Look Stranger*! Although the phrasing is not as brilliant as in Marvell's famous 'Horatian Ode' (1650) it is in some ways a better poem because it makes better sense. The political advice that Marvell gave Cromwell was much of it extremely inept . . .

In the last two examples the meaning whose primacy we are to acknowledge seems to be shrinking into something very like prose content—but is it just, in any case, to take Marvell's impersonal comments as *advice* to Cromwell? Often Mr. Bateson's more startling judgments, whether on poets or on the 'fatuity' of critical pronouncements with which he disagrees, are stated with surprising dogmatism: he does not argue the case for Auden any more than he stops to explain why it is misinterpretation which is at the root of the Awful Warnings in criticism which he lists—'Rymer on *Othello*, Johnson on Milton's sonnets, Macaulay on Restoration comedy, Eliot on Hobbes, Leavis on *Samson Agonistes*, C. S. Lewis on Donne'. Similarly with what he calls 'the cult of the bright idea' in Eliot: we are given no reasons *why* the pronouncements on *Hamlet*, *The Jew of Malta* and Othello's last speech are to be dismissed as fatuous.

The critical examples in Part II give the impression of having been selected to illustrate the general theory rather than constituting the particular instances from which the theory grew. Chaucer's 'fundamental sympathies' with the yeoman democracy are shown from the Miller's Tale, but surely even among the later Tales it would have been possible to find quite different attitudes?—and in any case there is far more in Chaucer than the embodiment of a social ethos. Though apparently so much more subtle than other sociological interpretations of literature Mr. Bateson's system tends to let essentials escape. Wyatt has to stand for the central Renaissance line down to Donne, Carew and Suckling, representing the 'mystical individualist in an unpredictable universe'. 'Renais-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sance poetry' seems the least plausible of all the schools when one thinks of the variety of work between Wyatt and Cowley. Milton is 'an off-shoot from the central trunk of English Renaissance poetry': like Spenser he had by birth no obvious social group or audience, though for a time at Cambridge he acquired one, which inspired the realistic pastoral successes *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. But can Milton's development really be explained quite so simply? The queer mechanical quality of Mr. Bateson's categories is shown in his remark that Milton was unlucky in that when he reached Cambridge 'the classic moment in English Renaissance poetry had already passed'. Further chapters deal with Waller ('the Augustan Wyatt'), Swift's *Description of the Morning* (as an attack on urban *laissez faire* capitalism), Gray's *Elegy* ('a plea for decentralization recalling the over-urbanized ruling class to its roots in a rural society . . .'), 'The quickest Way out of Manchester: Four Romantic Odes', 'Romantic Schizophrenia: Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears" ', and a comparison of Lionel Johnson's and Auden's poems on Oxford. On the whole the later chapters are the more rewarding but there is always a tendency to make the connexion between poetry and sociology too direct. The point is, I think, that an adequate critical reading of individual poems might lead one to make deductions about culture and society some of which would perhaps resemble Mr. Bateson's, but he is always trying to take short cuts, to generalize too soon and then to read back his generalizations into the poems themselves. In other words, if this kind of investigation is to mean anything it must start from a more rigorous critical analysis and evaluation; so conducted, it would be very unlikely to yield such a neat and mathematical scheme.

The primary importance of the critical approach is of course explicitly denied by Mr. Bateson in his penultimate chapter: 'The literary historian, by virtue of his grounding in historical facts, is less liable [than the critic] to distort the objectivity of the poetic fact'. Mr. Bateson's own detailed analysis is a constant refutation of this proposition. His references to Wordsworth's 'A slumber did my spirit seal' speak of 'pantheism and mysticism' in connexion with the last two lines, but this is patently bringing in ideas known to have been held by Wordsworth and expressed by him elsewhere, which are nevertheless not part of the poem as it stands. (A footnote suggests that 'a full critical discussion would need to go into the question of Lucy's identity'.) Again, in an analysis of Keats's 'Bright Star' Mr. Bateson supports his argument that its background is 'the conflict between lust and love' by a cancelled reading ('Half-passionless') and a note made by Keats in the margin of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. The literary historian's sense of relevance seems to be lacking in strictness: on the other hand, the phrases that he calls vague gestures of approval or disapproval, like 'natural speaking stress' or 'rhythmic deadness' can at least be established in discussion as qualities actually there in a given poem for more than one reader. How completely Mr. Bateson is capable of misunderstanding a critical discussion may be seen from his

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

travesty of F. R. Leavis's remarks about the relation of Pope to the seventeenth-century line of wit, a point developed in reference to the last book of *The Dunciad* and the Sporus portrait as well as in several pages of analysis of the *Unfortunate Lady* which make careful comparisons, contrasts and distinctions. The phrase 'Metaphysical descent' is used in a defining context fairly indicated by the sentence 'Pope is as much the last poet of the seventeenth-century as the first of the eighteenth-century'. For Mr. Bateson all this is an attempt 'to prove Pope a Metaphysical poet', a ' "hunch" based upon the examination of a few lines in an uncharacteristic poem'. If this is the way the literary historian reproduces critical argument, how can we accept him as more likely than the critic to be 'a trustworthy reporter of the poetry of the past'?

The final chapter makes some sensible suggestions about the reform of literary examinations; and it is characteristic of an extraordinarily mixed book that it should conclude with a general tribute to the part played by this journal and by the critical work of F. R. Leavis in providing a nucleus for an intelligent poetry-reading public.

R. G. Cox.

SIRE GAUVAIN ET LE CHEVALIER VERT. Traduction avec le texte en regard, une introduction et des notes par Émile Pons, Professeur a la Sorbonne (Aubier, Editions Montaigne, Paris).

This French edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* with a translation into French—the first translation of the poem into French—and an introduction by Émile Pons may well be preferred by many English readers to the English editions. The edition is, of course, intended to introduce the poem to French readers. In his translation M. Pons has wisely confined himself to reproducing the literal sense; and the original is opposite the translation. The French reader is thus given the chance to construct for himself an idea of what the original poem is like, both by looking at it and at M. Pons's careful rendering of the sense. To have attempted to reproduce the alliteration and other aspects of the poem in the translation would inevitably have resulted in distortion of the sense and would have interposed at best a different poem between the reader and the original. As it is, M. Pons's translation is surely the best aid to the poem which a French reader could receive.

But there are also reasons why English readers may prefer to read the original English poem in this edition, apart from the advantage of having M. Pons's French elucidation of the sense opposite each page. For one thing, M. Pons has done something towards rationalizing the spelling without injuring the poem; and, for another thing, his introduction is better than the English introductions to the poem. He recognizes much more clearly the great distinction of the poem, and can give an intelligent account of what that distinction consists in. He knows, for example, more clearly what his purpose is in examining the vocabulary of the poem; he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

examines it for the intelligent purpose of discovering positive evidence about the culture—the diverse culture—of the poet. The large Scandinavian and French elements in the vocabulary imply a simultaneous relationship with these two diverse traditions. That the culture of large parts of Britain must have been largely Scandinavian has been obscured by the heavy emphasis on Anglo-Saxon—as has also the strength of Celtic tradition. (Gawain, for example, appears to be the Irish Cuchulain.)

M. Pons is sensible also about the distracting minor issue of the association of the poem with the Order of the Garter. Although the French motto of the Order is quoted after the conclusion of the poem—it is also quoted in English in *Winner and Wastour*—there is nothing in the poem itself about the Garter; the Green Girdle is not identifiable with the Garter. As M. Pons says, the episode of Edward III and the Countess of Salisbury need not have been absent from the poet's mind when composing the scenes between Sir Gawain and the Lady, but that is not the point of these scenes.

The method M. Pons often adopts is to state clearly and to weigh up judiciously the views of different scholars on a particular question. A number of scholars have insisted that the story of the poem is a combination—a 'skilful' combination—of two separate stories, that of the 'beheading' and that of the 'fairy-mistress'. But if the view of the poem as based on the story of a dramatic ritual is correct—and all the evidence seems to concur to show it is so—these supposedly two stories were *originally* parts of one and the same story, the story of the ritual contest and the sequent ' sacred marriage'. Gawain and the Lady derive from the victor of the contest and the bride of the victor, the original fertility goddess. The Green Knight and Gawain would originally have been both distinct persons and yet have impersonated one and the same god; as the old and the young lady are distinct, yet one and the same.

The gay lady evidently corresponds to the Elfin Queen of the Ballads (and the Witch Cult). It is here that I have to record a difference of impression from M. Pons. He speaks of the lady as a 'tentatrice' and the scenes between her and Gawain as a 'tentation' It seems to me that 'testing' remains the more accurate word here, even though the testing has been transmuted by our poet into a testing of fitness for Christian knighthood. The lady is surely not felt—in this *particular* Christian poem—to be diabolic, any more than her husband is felt to be diabolic, even when he is again the Green Knight in the last Fit (though Gawain has had his doubts when approaching the hollow mound).

The green head is evidently what was originally a ritual mask and the green appearance as a whole the disguise of the impersonator of the god. On this subject of the 'greenness' M. Pons is completely in accord with what seems to me the just impression.

'Le vert est lié par nature au mythe saisonnier, pour la raison toute simple qu'il évoque la naissance des feuilles, le retour du printemps, la végétation divine et éternelle. Le chevalier vert serait le symbole vivant de ces forces mystérieuses et représenterait

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

même, selon Cook, un dieu-arbre dont sa branche de houx serait l'emblème—branche de houx, que portent aussi de nombreux autres héros, parmi eux le Parzival de Wolfram d'Eschenbach, de même que le culte du houx et du vert survit encore en mainte région forestière (chez les mineurs des alentours de Dean Forest, par exemple), "who still swear by a stock of holly" '.

JOHN SPEIRS.

ART BOOKS FOR ALL

THE STORY OF ART, by E. H. Gombrich (Phaidon, 21/-).
LANDSCAPE INTO ART, by Kenneth Clark (John Murray, 25/-).
ART AND SCIENCE, by Adrian Stokes (Faber, 15/-).

The three books under review happen to exemplify the three most obvious stages, distinct from scholarly art history, of writing about art: popularization for those with little or no previous knowledge—Mr. Gombrich has the adolescent especially in mind, public lecturing in the university where both enthusiasm and miscellaneous knowledge can be assumed, and criticism in the narrowest sense for fellow amateurs.

Mr. Gombrich's approach is in principle an admirable one. He does not discuss any works of art which he does not illustrate, which links his history firmly to practical criticism. He omits mere curiosities of fashion and confines himself mainly to acknowledged masterpieces, which preserves centrality. He also claims to follow the excellent principle of only describing works which he has actually seen, though, unless memory deceives me, I am sure that the building called 'La Greffe' in Bruges (fig. 209) has no wood on its façade. There are indeed a great many inaccuracies of fact and over-simplifications, some more than minor. The Duc de Berry was *not* Burgundian wherever his artists came from (p. 158). Dürer's drawing of grasses (fig. 212) cannot be called a lawn in English. Gauguin lived among the Tahitians not the Maoris (p. 416). It is at least misleading to class the Ducal Palace in Venice with Gothic town halls (p. 150). Questions of influences and relationships are involved in these notes on the historical background, and their woolliness is unfortunately typical of a good deal of the study.

Mr. Gombrich deals mainly with the arts of painting and sculpture in Western Europe, following more or less traditional lines. He does not spend much time on archaic Greece, but writes two chapters on the fifth and fourth centuries. He gives the Italian Renaissance its fullest weight, and puts his last emphasis on the Post-Impressionists. Architecture receives secondary consideration; Mr. Gombrich is effective on the Gothic cathedrals and their significance, structural and cultural, and on Baroque palaces and churches, but rather scrappy on the English eighteenth century which he illustrates with Chiswick House and Strawberry Hill,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

both in their separate ways exotic products. His oddest passage is the following:

> 'Something of this love of simplicity and clear arrangements seems to have gone into the style of building which the Greeks introduced in these early days, and which, strange to say, still lives on in our own towns and villages. Fig. 45 shows a Greek temple of the old style which was called after the Doric tribe. This was the tribe to which the Spartans, who were noted for their austerity belonged. . . . Probably the earliest of such temples were built of timber . . . '

Who would guess that he was describing the Parthenon? The relation of Greek temple architecture to more primitive buildings is an interesting subject, but it is not expounded. On the other hand Mr. Gombrich is very lucid on the evolution of Greek classical sculpture from archaic types and should help to dispel many illusions.

In his principal field of study also his quality is not consistent. On major points of art history there are over-simplifications and even misrepresentations, especially in those places where the historical facts are open to some differences in interpretation. His comparison between Ghiberti and Donatello as sculptors of bronze relief (p. 181) completely ignores the 'Gates of Paradise'. I do not claim any detailed knowledge of the origins and nature of Mannerism but the account of it as little more than imitation of Michelangelo (p. 266) seems very inadequate. Constable was, we know, an innovator of great importance and influence on the art of Europe, but to say, 'He wanted to paint what he saw with his own eyes—not those of Claude Lorrain' (p. 393), ignores his life-long admiration for, and constant study and copying of, that master. Further, it is misleading to say that Monet learned much from seeing the works of Turner in London in 1870 and neglect the fact that he only saw the big classical compositions (p. 393).

Mr. Gombrich is aware of the danger of banality when dealing with a series of masterpieces to which only praise is appropriate, but he has not entirely avoided it. There is much good exposition, for example on Michelangelo and Raphael—one notes especially his descriptions of the *Creation of Adam* in the Sistine Chapel and of the *Galatea* in the Farnesina. There are some telling juxtapositions of illustrations, for example the Bellini and the Titian (figs. 201-2). On the other hand, the principle of avoiding technical terms and 'jargon', whatever that may mean, unless they are first explained, lands Mr. Gombrich in some confused situations. He explains 'nave' twice, which one would have thought was common knowledge, but does not explain 'façade', and, in its own connection, talks of an 'en face' instead of a full face portrait. Also in the middle of his note on oriental art he explains 'meditation'. There is a good deal of vague and otiose writing. We are told of Titian that 'He was principally and first of all a painter', and that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'The West never knew this immobility. It was always restless, groping for new solutions and new ideas' (p. 131), and, as a prize chestnut, the subject being Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, 'He knew the spell which would infuse life into the colours by his magic brush' (p. 220). It is strange how persistent this last cliché is in art criticism. It is probably preferable to most more rationalized explanations of the creative faculty but it deflects attention from a proper analysis of the products of that faculty. One hardly expects critical rigour in a work such as Mr. Gombrich's; his chief aim is to arouse interest, which he does very well. His notes on the feeling of 'rightness' in a composition and on the need to understand an artist's peculiar harmonies suggest the right approach, but one would like a far more close, and indeed organic, relating of technique and composition to subject matter in his accounts of particular pictures.

Mr. Gombrich reflects pretty completely the artistic outlook as it has developed during the last twenty years. The High Renaissance retains its status and has been joined by Mannerism as well as the Baroque. Functionalism is going out and the Gothic Revival coming in. Cézanne and van Gogh still have far more prestige than they seem to me to deserve, especially the latter. Odd birds like Klee remain on their pedestals—I was amazed to find him allotted a coloured plate—and Picasso's most irresponsible manifestations (another coloured plate—of a porcelain dish) are still taken notice of. One would have liked to have seen a more critical selection of material in a volume of this kind published with the 'imprimatur' of the Phaidon Press and likely to have considerable influence.

Sir Kenneth Clark's book has many virtues that *The Story of Art* lacks by its very nature and intention. It is careful and scholarly. Sir Kenneth Clark is full of enthusiasm for his theme and for certain favourite painters in particular (a very clumsy early Cézanne is pronounced 'stunning') but he is concise and to the point, and writes with an easy and urbane assurance that his readers will take at once and appreciate his wealth of information and allusion.

In examining the various ways in which representations of external nature have appeared in paint in Western Europe, he combines the historical with the thematic approach with varying degrees of coherence. The surviving Gothic frescoes, mediæval illuminations and Italian primitives can all be considered as belonging to the *Landscape of Symbols* in which the actual world is represented by accepted stylizations. One sees the gradual shift of interest to what Sir Kenneth Clark calls the *Landscape of Fact* in the works of the Limbourgs,[1] Pisanello and Hubert van Eyck. Into this second chapter he gathers the pioneers of perspective in Italy, Giovanni Bellini, Breughel, the Dutch painters of townscapes, Rembrandt and the early Gainsborough, all painters

[1] I would point out a minor confusion of reference on p. 12. The December scene from the *Très Riches Heures* is on Pl. 13 and the other scene on the same Pl. is not May but August.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

interested in the exact nature of objects, natural or artificial, and, in varying degrees, in the effects of light upon them as an enveloping medium—the comparison of the two pictures of the *Agony in the Garden* by Mantegna and Bellini respectively makes a point succinctly. We then come to two groups of painters who most clearly exemplify the Pathetic Fallacy; the *Landscape of Fantasy* which includes Altdorfer, Leonardo of the backgrounds and the *Deluges*, Piero di Cosimo, the Mannerists, Tintoretto, El Greco, Rubens and Salvator Rosa, and the *Ideal Landscape*, which includes Giorgione, Claude Lorrain, Poussin and, rather oddly, Samuel Palmer. The *Natural Vision* deals with Constable, Corot, the Barbizon School, Courbet and the Impressionists. The plan then disintegrates and we have studies of Turner and van Gogh, and of Seurat and Cézanne, representing the *Return to Order*. I do not intend to quarrel with the grouping of painters. Obviously the categories overlap; some correspond to historical schools and movements while others are the generalizations of the art historian. But with all the air of clarity and easy grasp of the subject, there is a certain lack of precise critical definition throughout the book. Sir Kenneth Clark writes, for example,

> 'Facts become Art through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plane of reality; and, in landscape, this all embracing love is expressed by light' (p. 16).

and goes on to discuss the van Eycks and Giovanni Bellini whose

> 'landscapes are the supreme instance of facts transfigured through love. Few artists have been capable of such universal love, which embraces every twig, every stone, the humblest detail as well as the most grandiose perspective . . . ' (p. 24).

But Constable's

> 'The sound of water escaping from mill-dams, willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts and brickwork, I love such things'.

is later quoted (p. 79) and it is also stated:

> 'But by "chiaroscuro of nature' Constable also meant that some drama of light and shade must underlie all landscape compositions, and give the keynote of feeling in which the scene is painted' (p. 76).

Wherein, I think one may fairly ask, lies the difference between the works of the two painters? Both are examples of the man who, in Ruskin's words, 'perceives rightly in spite of his feelings, and to whom the primrose is ever nothing else than itself—a little flower apprehended in the very plain and leafy fact of it, whatever and how many soever the associations and passions may be that crowd round it', yet it seems almost absurd to have to say that their pictures look different. Neither mere differentiation of subject matter nor generalizations about the artists' love is helpful in discussing

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

these two painters or any others. When Sir Kenneth Clark writes of Constable's 'free, painter-like handling' he is telling us something very simple and useful about his pictures; when he writes:

> 'And in his greatest work naturalism is raised to a higher mode by his belief that since nature was the clearest revelation of God's will, the painting of landscape, conceived in the spirit of humble truth, could be the means of conveying moral ideas.' (p. 78).

he is saying something which may be true but which needs a great deal of expansion to relate it to what we actually see. Sir Kenneth Clark writes on the temperaments of artists and on matters of technique. A good deal of his account of Cézanne deals with his formal aspects and he writes of van Gogh's 'wheels and whorls of fire . . . the brightest, crudest colours which can be squeezed with urgency from a tube'. He writes well on Poussin's principles of composition. But if 'art', as he says, 'is concerned with our whole being' and if a successful picture makes a unified response, one would like more integrated and particularized analyses of his chief examples. The page (58) on Giorgione's *Tempesta* gives a hint, though the comparison with *Endymion* is unfair to Giorgione, but the next page on the *Fête Champêtre* tails off into one of Pater's least relevant reveries. The account of Impressionism ends with a large assertion comparable to that about Constable; we are told that 'it was the painting of democrats. Impressionism is the perfect expression of democratic humanism, of the good life which was, till recently, thought to be within reach of all' (p. 95)—Sir Kenneth Clark is thinking of picnic scenes by rivers and so on. A genuine critical method would organize and clarify all this, giving life and significance to the generalities or else demolishing them.

It seems to me that one can take the Pathetic Fallacy for granted in practically all landscape painting. Somewhere the artist's temperament supervenes between the scene he is portraying and the final production in paint. Ruskin's three categories of perception represent convenient descriptions of the degrees of transmutation involved; his evaluation in these terms belongs to his own time. The critic's task is to find words to describe the total effect of a picture, whatever large category it may belong to, and, if possible, to decide whether it is acceptable to a mature and trained sensibility as a visual experience. We are at the present time remarkably eclectic in our taste in art, possibly because of the absence of a dominant contemporary school which would have a conditioning influence—this situation exists to some extent, I think, in literary taste, or did exist during the 'nineteen-thirties. We aspire to appreciate the best work of all periods and as far as possible on its own terms. The popular academic art of the last century we reject for its vulgarity and triviality. Sir Kenneth Clark has some interesting things to say about the nature of vulgarity in landscape painting with reference to Courbet, Leader and others. It is a manifestation of the Pathetic Fallacy in the form of certain collocations of colour

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and tone, and it is not merely the intrusion of the artist's feelings, it is the particular quality of those feelings that disgusts the spectator of critical taste.

We now come to a master of generalization and conjecture. Mr. Stokes has achieved some standing as a critic of art. The notions underlying *Quattrocento* and *Stones of Rimini*, rather fanciful ideas of stone blossoming into decoration and of relationships between the delicate low reliefs of Agostino di Duccio and effects of swirling water, were stimulating if not very precise. Obviously certain fifteenth century Italian buildings such as the Tempio Malatesteana itself and the Palace at Urbino were part of Mr. Stokes's consciousness in the way poems or music can be. It is evident that the ideas and architecture of Alberti and the paintings of Piero della Francesca and of Giorgione are deeply felt by Mr. Stokes, but he seems to have made no effort to find intelligible verbal equivalents for his sensations. In the following passage:

> 'Piero's buildings do not produce an actual architecture employing the new classical members, as much as they suggest the preciousness and the smoothness of ivory conceived upon an Olympian, mathematical scale.' (p. 27).

one wonders what 'Olympian' and 'mathematical' are intended to imply. Largeness? Smallness? One can discern dimly the perceptions which inspired the following reflections on Piero's forms:

> 'Distributed by perspective they converse through spatial simultaneity, through their affinities that search it out. The postures of these forms acknowledge the same sublime homeliness. Angels and princes make themselves known with the slow gestures of a calm peasantry . . . . Perspective separates, colour and form bring together in family circle the crupper on a horse and the shoulder of a hill, the fluting of columns and the hanging folds of a dress.' (p. 31).

They show a finely sensitive appreciation of the Arezzo frescoes. But such things as:

> 'Piero achieved equation between true science and a majestic rapture from the earth. We sense geometry and number expressing the amplitude of love: we witness an untorn naturalism: . . .'.
>
> Love and the love of perspective were one, the perspective, for instance, of tilted circular shapes expressed with the slow piety of very exact drawing.' (p. 30).

and

> 'Piero reveals the family of things. He does not suggest a leaning from the house of the mind. He shows, on the contrary, the mind becalmed . . . ' (p. 36).

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are almost entirely private and emotive utterances. In so far as one experiences anything in reading Mr. Stokes, it does not seem to have a very close reference to anything one saw in San Francisco. He writes further of Piero:

> 'In visual art alone, and then solely in visual art founded upon this colour-cum-architectural sense of form, an aesthetic communication may be explicit and immediate to the point of rebutting after-thought. It is the *réaliser* of Cézanne.' (p. 35).

'After-thought' is however the task of the critic. Mr. Stokes has such an overwhelming sense of the organic relation of form and content in Piero and of this fusing spirit of love that he does not analyse his response. He presents a verbal *'réalisation'* of such dense texture that one cannot penetrate it, as one can the impressions of the older critics where one merely sorts out the sentimental associations into the acceptable and the unacceptable.

There is a good deal of delicate commentary on Giorgione. I am not qualified to discuss his connections with music; Mr. Stokes's remarks seem very impressionistic. I cannot see that the accounts of Aristotelean controversies at Padua, help our understanding of the pictures. The kind of allegory that needs a gloss, if it was intended, is best forgotten. On the other hand, Mr. Stokes's remarks on Giorgione's formal qualities, his liking for what he calls 'bell-tent' forms, are very general and nothing much is said about their significance in particular pictures—some of the comparisons are rather of the 'salmons in both' order.

Mr. Stokes's book probably suffers from its lack of definite purpose and a known body of readers sharing a critical idiom. It is taken for granted that we know all about the various scientific ideas and mathematical discoveries of Alberti and Piero della Francesca and we are only given a sketchy indication of the effects on their work. This is regrettable because an intelligent exposition of the subject by a man of Mr. Stokes's sensibility would be very worthwhile. The book has a dilettante air which conceals his deep seriousness. His ideas and intuitions are too often cluttered with unrealized imagery or blurred beyond the possibility of communication in the fog of what seems like deliberately worked up mystery.

As regards the production of the three books, *Landscape into Art* is admirably done and most of its illustrations are of excellent quality, *The Story of Art* is not quite up to Phaidon standards especially in the coloured plates and *Art and Science* contains some of the poorest reproductions I have seen in any recent book priced so highly for its slender size.

GEOFFREY WALTON.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ACADEMIC CRITICISM TO-DAY

SHAKESPEARE'S PROBLEM PLAYS, by E. M. W. Tillyard (*Chatto and Windus,* 8/6).

ENGLISH DRAMA FROM EARLY TIMES TO THE ELIZABETHANS, by A. P. Rossiter (*Hutchinson,* 16/-).

Two recent books bearing on the Elizabethan theatre and written by members of the Cambridge English School invite us to reflect on the present status of academic criticism and—what is perhaps even more important—on its relationship to serious educational purposes in general. The result of these reflections cannot be called encouraging. Literary studies by authors of accepted academic standing should, it seems reasonable to assume, either offer a genuine contribution to critical understanding or aim at making accessible to a wider public the results of trained reading or specialist investigation. The two books under consideration, whilst maintaining their full share of intellectual pretension, fail singularly to achieve either of these purposes. Offering complication where simplicity would have been in order, and combining superficial pretensions to originality with contents at once derivative and bleakly pedestrian, they leave us asking ourselves whether the academic tradition to which they supposedly belong has not forfeited its claim to intellectual leadership and left unfulfilled, at a time of critical importance, the vital educational function which its representatives of earlier generations would certainly have regarded it as their duty to meet.

Dr. Tillyard's book on *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* is a typical product of recent academic aspirations to critical capacity. It sets out to examine *Hamlet, Troilus and Cressida, All's Well That Ends Well,* and *Measure for Measure,* but readers of his previous books on Shakespeare will not be surprised to find that he has nothing substantially original to offer on any of these plays. A pedestrian introductory chapter tells us that the group thus isolated for treatment is distinguished by a preoccupation with 'either religious dogma or abstract speculation or both', by 'an acute interest in observing and recording the details of human nature', and by a strong contrast between 'the old and new generations' and between 'old and new habits of thought'. None of these themes, however, is subjected to detailed analysis or related to the characteristic modes of expression which differentiate these plays, by their possession of common qualities, from the rest of Shakespeare's production; and so it is only to be expected that the following chapters, which purport to contain detailed studies of each play, never look like penetrating to the heart of their subject. A brief discussion of *Hamlet* opens with a statement, surprising at so late a date, that it is still necessary to offer reasons for classing this work with the 'problem plays' (p. 4);

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and it scarcely emerges from an academic discussion of the proper definition of tragedy except to offer such astonishing remarks as the observation (p. 24) that Hamlet's interview with his mother 'shows his most winning sanity and the utmost delicacy of his sensibilities' and the statement (p. 26) that 'one of *Hamlet's* virtues resembles that of Masefield's *Odtaa*, where the sheer variety and the very lack of a rigorous type of casual logic for every detail are part of the point'. One wonders whether the author of these comments has ever really paused in his reading to consider the remarkably contorted and *obsessed* quality of so much of Hamlet's apostrophe in the closet scene or whether he has any inkling of the struggle to achieve coherent expression which is demonstrably present in so much of the verse of the play. For the rest, Dr. Tillyard's prevailing lack of critical precision is sufficiently shown in his observation that Marcellus' description in the first scene of the preparations for war *'somehow'* (as though the lines were not susceptible of elementary analysis) 'forces one to hear the beat of hammers in the distance as the accompaniment of the scene' (p. 29), and in the general remark that *Hamlet* is 'a play presenting the utmost variety of human experience in the largest possible cosmic setting' (p. 28). Observations of this kind, if they mean anything, can only be usefully offered if backed by some definition of terms and the necessary precision of analysis.

If Dr. Tillyard's treatment of *Hamlet* is blurred and unilluminating, his chapters on the remaining plays show a typical tendency to replace serious criticism by the superficial use of erudition. After devoting some twenty pages mainly to consideration of pre-Shakespearean treatment of the story of *Troilus and Cressida*, ostensibly to 'quench all moanings' (by whom?) 'that Shakespeare was guilty of degrading the high Homeric tradition', he tells us (p. 51) that he 'cannot share the optimism of those critics who have believed that this or that traditional strain or nearer influence gives the entry into the play itself'. By thus removing significance from his own labours just undertaken, the author would seem to be bringing us, justly if belatedly, to the conclusion that erudite speculations are no substitute for a close reading of Shakespeare's text; and yet his own treatment, in what remains of his study, can offer little more than a number of disjointed coincidences with some of the findings of other critics (not always fully acknowledged; his remarks, in a concluding footnote on p. 89, on Wilson Knight's essay in *The Wheel of Fire* is something less than generous) which leave the problem of the play's true significance almost entirely unaffected. It would be hard to find a better example of the academic critic's unwillingness to admit his own incapacity to offer a serious constructive reading of his text.

The following essay, on *All's Well*, though shorter, has substantially the same story to tell. Once more Dr. Tillyard feels, rightly, that the play is a failure; but once more the reasons he feels impelled to find for this failure (p. 93) are pitifully insufficient. 'We shall never know the reason for this failure, *which may well have been*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nothing more complicated than an attack of the toothache' (my italics) 'at the critical time of creation; but it may help a little to point out that Shakespeare had, in the plot he chose and in the treatment he proposed to give it, set himself a task of great difficulty'. Such a remark ignores the fact that the critic's proper concern is with the *nature,* not with the *cause,* of failure, with the poet's means of expression rather than with his original sources. Why, we may properly ask, did Shakespeare choose precisely this plot, to what impulse did it correspond, and to what extent does such intractability as we may detect in the material correspond to a similar, and demonstrable, instability in the writing? Here, surely, is the core of the problem presented by these plays, a problem not to be met by references to hypothetical 'toothaches' or by erudite evasion. The last essay, on *Measure for Measure,* shows a similar tendency to solve all artistic problems by producing the usual academic rabbit out of the professorial hat; for this is as kind a description as can honestly be given to the attempt to establish a parallel between the behaviour of Isabella and the situation of Jeanie Deans in *Heart of Midlothian,* or to the remark in which the whole study appears to culminate (p. 129): 'The fact of the play's inconsistency, then, seems to me undoubted: the reason for it must be conjectural, yet conjectural within not excessive bounds of probability. I believe it may be found through considering Shakespeare's originals'. That the critic who believes that the answer to the artistic problems presented by so great an artist as Shakespeare is to be found in this kind of manipulation of 'sources' should also be so obtuse to the impact of linguistic vitality as to find the great scene (II. iv) in which Angelo tempts Isabella 'terribly obscure in places' and 'simply' not to be read 'with unimpeded pleasure' is indeed all of a piece; and it may reasonably justify us in concluding, even apart from the existence of other evidence, that a serious discussion of the plays is not to be looked for in this book.

Mr. Rossiter's book, also from Cambridge, is more popular in its declared purpose. It aims at summarizing the early history of the English stage with a view to tracing the connections between the traditions of popular drama and certain features of the Elizabethan theatre; but it is difficult to agree that most of the links indicated really illuminate the argument, or that the proposition, in itself unexceptionable, that the Elizabethan stage was essentially 'popular', that 'it grew great because it became London's and England's, not the preserve of a class or "highbrow" clique of Sidneys and their tame poets' (p. 145), is adequately demonstrated. It may be his sense of a failure to make his subject live in terms of his own declared purpose that has prompted the author to diversify his pages with particularly tiresome flashes of 'wit'—we are told, for example, of Wever's interlude *Lusty Juventus* that 'it casts both a baleful eye and Bale's-full of dirt at the old religion' (p. 123)—or with the kind of contemporary reference that produces such remarks as: 'It may be admitted that Prudentius seems prophetically aware of Mr. (C. S.) Lewis's admonitory eyebrow, and therefore attempts to save the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

patience of Patience by presenting that undramatic virtue as a kind of moral pachyderm or ethical Churchill-tank-amid-the-infantry, passive before the darts of rage, but totally impervious' (p. 89).

This last quotation is, indeed, characteristic of Mr. Rossiter's 'style' which seems singularly calculated to obscure whatever points his study was originally intended to convey. It does not desert him when he sets out, from time to time, to evolve general statements to illuminate the collection of laboriously assembled facts with which his book is mainly concerned. Of this speculative note the following—capitals, illustrations, and all—is a fair example: 'Any art which is in the smallest degree "representative" or "imitative" offers two distinguishable aspects. One is what might be called an EVENT: something which exists or existed in time, or was supposed to exist—such as Van Gogh's sunflowers, or the France of Shaw's *St. Joan*, or of Shakespeare's *Henry VI*; Renoir's servant Gabrielle or the Jerusalem of a miracle-play or the background of Bruegel's *March to Calvary*. These might be called REFERENCES, and can be as close to some actual state-of-affairs as the material of a 'documentary' film, or as remote from factuality as the stuff of Tennyson's *Idylls* or Strindberg's *Dream Play* or Kafka's *The Castle*. Much in artistic 'treatment' depends on the degree of imaginative distance between the items presented and the EVENTS to which they seem to point. In Velasquez' *Rokeby Venus* the REFERENCE seems to belong to the world of statement: the imaginative distance is small. In the dome at Florence which Brunelleschi modelled on the contour of Cléo de Merode's breast the REFERENCE belongs to a world of allusion, and the imaginative distance is great' (p. 17).

Confronted by such a passage—and the book abounds in them—one cannot help asking oneself whether the author can be supposed to have given due consideration either to the clear definition of his own thought or to his purpose in writing. Can the meaning to be attached to 'events' and 'references' be satisfactorily established, or the different function of these two terms in the argument clearly deduced from what Mr. Rossiter has written? Is there any reason why the examples given in illustration were chosen in preference to others equally removed from the subject in hand? or can most of them be assumed to mean anything to the type of reader for whom the book was presumably written? If the answer to these questions is, as we must surely conclude, in each case negative, can we avoid finding that this book fails notably either to achieve critical distinction or to further the educational aims proposed by the series to which it belongs? To compare this study with the work produced, with a similar purpose in view, by scholars of previous generations—the better volumes in the *English Men of Letters* series could be taken as an example—is to be aware of a serious decline, both in critical quality and in integrity of purpose: a decline which argues that modern university scholarship is in danger of forfeiting both its intellectual standing and its claim to exercise the vital educational function traditionally associated with it.

DEREK TRAVERSI.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED